What's holding SA back from the public cloud?

By Johan Scheepers   6 Aug 2018

The 2018 Right Scale State of the Cloud report says that 81% of all surveyed enterprises have a multi-cloud strategy. It also predicts that 66% of cloud users intend on growing their cloud spend by 20% or more, this year. But what of the local market, where several factors seem to be impeding public cloud consideration, including the current lack of major public cloud players' presence on our shores?

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Many South African businesses have embraced some level of cloud adoption. The cost savings and efficiencies enabled by public cloud offerings are certainly attractive, however, most organisations tend to stick with hybrid cloud solutions or purely private cloud. There are a number of concerns that are giving rise to this reticence.

Compliance and regulatory frameworks

With the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in play, and the Protection of Personal Information (PoPI) Act looming in South Africa, compliance is a very hot topic right now. It has become vital for organisations to understand where their data is at any given time. Public cloud platforms have not yet established local hosting facilities, although Microsoft's Azure platform is due to land in the very near future and there is talk of Amazon following suit. This calls the issue of data sovereignty into question.

With public cloud platforms, it's not a simple matter to pinpoint where a business's data is, so organisations are being careful to avoid them for any data that is impacted by privacy regulations. So saying, many businesses are still turning to the public cloud for non-sensitive data storage or applications, tentatively exploring the benefits. When public cloud platforms do land on our shores, these concerns may well become moot.

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Buy in

Despite the advertised cost savings, optimisation opportunities and other benefits offered by public cloud services, there is a lack of awareness and a general wariness of cloud at an executive level that is also stalling local uptake.

Cost savings is highlighted as one of the main reasons for migrating to the cloud, however, there are questions about cost management and "hidden costs" that give executives pause. As most cloud services are offered on a pay-per-use model, managing the costs of consumption – including data costs, elastic application costs, data storage and retrieval costs – can become a difficult task. Often, executives consider the complexity not worth the risk, however, some are exploring creative ways to circumvent this, including creating new roles for this purpose.

There are also a number of concerns around cloud security. In South Africa, lack of factual data around security breaches makes it hard to pinpoint what the local threat landscape is, and there is the assumption that public clouds aren't as secure as private or on-premise environments. However, public cloud providers have their reputations to consider and need to ensure that the services they offer are bolstered by robust, continually updated and advanced security measures. Executives need to evaluate the security offered by these platforms against their own standards and weigh up the differences.

Predominantly, though, it's a disconnect between IT departments, business executives and vendors that creates this lack of information and communication. Vendors need to ensure they are clear and concise about their offering, not just selling a vague solution, but pinpointing business benefits, outlining all costs, and highlighting security benefits. They need to truly take the time to understand the customer requirements, and not just sell products that may contain too many or not enough of the solutions to meet an individual customer's needs.

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Trust

Trust and security are big red flags for businesses looking to expand into the public cloud. From a trust perspective, cloud providers need to build customer confidence in their ability to protect and manage their customer's data. Their sales depend upon it. For this reason, public cloud providers take security very seriously and typically have large, dedicated teams behind cutting-edge security technology to ensure their reputation is protected.

Cloud customers should not rest on their laurels, however. They need to work with their cloud provider to understand the security measures in place, and ensure they protect their data from the inside out, too. Ancillary security products, internal data policies and data security awareness and enforcement all merge to offer a blanket to address security concerns.

Ease of use

Public cloud users struggle with latency issues, due to inconsistent connectivity and a need to access data that resides in another country. This has hampered uptake to date, however local presence for public cloud vendors will quickly address this concern.

In conclusion, there is a lot of excitement being generated by the idea of public cloud and most organisations agree that this is the direction the world is moving towards; public cloud as a mainstream platform is a likely inevitability. However, whether businesses are just dipping their toes into the cloud, or plunging ahead with their cloud strategies, its key to note that businesses need to approach their journey as just that: a journey. A measured approach, transitioning to cloud as and when it makes sense, in a well-planned and carefully considered manner, is key to ensuring ultimate cloud success.

View the 2018 Right Scale State of the Cloud report.

ABOUT JOHAN SCHEEPERS

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