A New Way To Reach The Clouds

The possibilities made available by cloud-based UC services have created present economic efficiencies that are becoming too attractive to ignore.

By Frederic Dickey, director of product management, Sangoma Technologies

Technology pundits love to discuss market innovations. And these days, the talk almost always revolves around the cloud. This, of course, makes perfect sense. IP-based cloud solutions are changing the game in ways businesses interact with customers and conduct their day-to-day operations. Cloud services can tangibly reduce operating expenses, capital expenditures, and TCO, especially in comparison to more costly premise-based hardware and applications. But despite the dramatic efficiency and productivity gains that might be realized, the cost of upgrading to 100% cloud-based services is not as simple as many believe. Of course, the simple cost advantages of eliminating the capital expenses required for procuring new IP-capable on-premise equipment literally jumps off of the ledger sheet. But, there are other tangible and intangible costs associated with the cloud that need to be understood before undertaking such a radical change.

For example, equipment costs trade off with service fees; the cost of user training and support for new systems and operational methods seemingly takes a significant bite out of the cost advantage, and the backup plan most companies will insist on implementing — just in case the cloud fizzles — all add to the complex cost of making the wholesale switch to cloud-based services. For these reasons and more, resellers should guide their customers through a process of analyzing existing capabilities and systems, determining what new capabilities will have a meaningful impact on the bottom line, and implementing a hybrid system that leverages the profound advantages of cloud-based services in areas that are not already adequately served by existing infrastructure. The operational consistency for users alone will provide dividends on the investment in new cloud technology.

On top of the unknowns, the basic process of implementing cloud-based technologies can be a quite expensive, disruptive, and complex prospect for businesses — especially those that are still heavily invested in legacy TDM infrastructure. They are caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Employees and customers both continue demanding the anytime/anywhere features and benefits of a world driven by always-connected mobility and ubiquitous IP networks, and management is left with the costs and challenges of connecting the endless technology dots that can make such possibilities a reality. Let's face it: Traditionally, it hasn't been easy for VARs and their customers to weave together a heterogeneous environment of disparate networking protocols, media, and codecs into a seamlessly homogenous network.

These integration issues become especially pronounced in the arenas of cloud-based unified communications (UC) and video collaboration. As the employee base of many organizations continue to disperse geographically, and both road- and home-based teleworkers make up more of their general workforces, IP-powered UC solutions continue to become the go-to strategy for facilitating voice and data communications between widespread parties and locations. For many businesses, early UC solutions were considered too costly and too unproven to adopt, but the possibilities made available by cloud-based UC services have created present economic efficiencies that are becoming too attractive to ignore. As a result, many resellers have noted an increasing demand for the cloud lately. The same holds true for organizations leveraging IP-based video services. The cost of using legacy videoconferencing technologies were also often considered a luxury by many; however, once again, cloud-based providers are now delivering service price points that are much more viable for many more customers. ●

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