BT Compute

Top ten tips for CIO s considering a move to the cloud.

IT leaders who are yet to consider the use of on-demand technology are advised to prepare for a hybrid future.

The importance of cloud computing to modern business is recognised by media and industry commentators alike. What is, perhaps, less understood is the steps that will be key for CIOs and IT managers looking to move activity on-demand. Technology leaders face a bewildering amount of choice, complexity and confusion.

The following ten tips will help you as your business attempts to make a move towards the cloud. These tips will focus on the practical steps you can take as your organisation embraces on-demand technology, both now and in the future. The article will help you establish where on-demand IT is right for the business, what you can do to integrate existing services and how you can change provision in a way that is as pain-free as possible.

1 Recognise the cloud can give you a competitive edge:

CIOs might be spending more on on-demand services than ever before, but the cloud still represents a small part of the overall IT market. Analyst Gartner reports only 38% of organisations use cloud services today. Demand, however, is set to increase rapidly. As much as 80% of companies intend to use cloud services in some form within 12 months, including 55% of organisations not doing so currently. So even CIOs who are yet to move on-demand are advised to prepare for the cloud, with 60% of firms planning to increase their spending during the next two years.

2 Prepare for a hybrid, mixed and matched world:

The future of enterprise IT will be based around a hybrid mix of on- and off-site services, reports researcher Forrester. As many as 45% of companies already rely on at least one SaaS application today, and a third of companies use some form of infrastructure-as-a-service. IT leaders operating in a hybrid world still own a portion of the business's technology resources but a growing proportion is bought by executives on-demand. CIOs looking to retain control are advised to get a grip on the hybrid nature of technology resources.

3 Integrate services because one size does not fit all:

Nearly all CIOs (87%) believe cloud technologies are now important to their business, according to Wakefield Research. However, a majority of CIOs (83%) assign similar importance to on-premise systems. IT leaders must face a future of hybrid environments that integrate on-premise and cloud-based applications. The key will be integration, as one size of on- or off-site provision will not fit all business requirements. Wakefield suggests smart CIOs are already focusing on integration. The good news is that three quarters (75%) of users report that integrated hybrid solutions are often less complex.

4 Manage implementations to create business benefits:

Auditing will always be crucial, even once cloud systems are in place. Market Monitor, a service of 451 Research, suggests CIOs are spending more money on tools that help the business keep a careful eye on the performance of on-demand technologies. The researcher suggests spending on cloud tools related to security, automation and management will increase 21% annually through 2016. Growth in spending on these cloud-auditing technologies is being driven by a need from CIOs to control and secure on-demand environments. By managing and checking the performance of cloud deployments, CIOs can prove the benefits of on-demand computing to the business.

5 Audit existing IT systems before moving on-demand:

While executives can use the cloud to purchase their own IT on-demand, CIOs must be careful and ensure a strong form of governance is established to prevent resource duplication.

The key is to undertake thorough analysis of enterprise systems before moving to the cloud. This is where the CIO can provide guidance around existing legacy resources and potential cloud purchases. Such a thorough audit allows the business to identify opportunities. Take space agency NASA, which recently completed an audit that suggests up to 40% of legacy systems could move to the cloud.

6 Focus on business demand to overcomeshadow IT:

Digital-savvy users who do not receive access to the systems they require might circumnavigate the CIO and implement their own technology. Such shadow IT represents a growing menace for CIOs. Research from information professional community AIIM says more than one in four organisations have to deal with the unofficial use of cloud file-sharing sites, such as Dropbox. CIOs will be better placed to control shadow IT if they understand cloud computing from a business-centric, rather than a technology-centric, perspective. By understanding the requirements of users, CIOs can use the cloud to implement approved on-demand systems that allows users to work flexibly and which reduce the security risks associated to shadow IT.

7 Prepare for explosive growth in resource requirements:

A survey from TheInfoPro, a service of 451 Research, says spending on infrastructure and software as a service activity has doubled in the past six months and now accounts for between 30% and 33% of projects. CIOs are advised to talk to their business peers and consider which of their systems could potentially be moved to the cloud. By considering the cloud now, IT leaders can test their deployments and ensure ondemand systems are ready for new business requirements as they emerge.

8 Overcome non-IT roadblocks to avoid project blockages:

Researcher TheInfoPro warns that 83% of CIOs believe significant obstacles are slowing the speed of cloud implementation. These blockages are often related to people, process and political concerns. Regulatory and compliance concerns can de-rail a project at an early stage, so speak with business peers at an early stage in the process. Discover the rules and regulations that are likely to limit how the cloud can be used. Plan your implementations around the regulatory environment, the requirements of people using the technology and then take any lessons learned to the next phase of on-demand development.

9 Be careful not to ignore the importance of legacy apps:

Going on-demand can save money but it is also crucial to recognise that some of your existing IT investments will not be best suited to a cloud environment. Researcher Forrester says only apps already designed with high availability and performance in-mind will suit a shift to the cloud. Many businesses will need to match legacy requirements with new opportunities to introduce software-as-a-service (SaaS). Analyst Gartner suggests as many as 77% of IT leaders expect to increase their investments in SaaS through 2014.

10 Use other specialist providers to boost efficiencies:

As much as 90% of companies now use some form of cloud technology, says IT industry association CompTIA. This bedrock means many firms have moved beyond implementation to a second phase of on-demand computing, which involves using different models in combination to boost efficiency, such as a mix of on- an off-premise systems and a blend of public and private clouds. CompTIA says more than six in ten cloud users have already made secondary shifts of infrastructure or applications following their original transition to the cloud. These shifts in provision help CIOs ensure cloud investments match business need.