Strengthen your cloud strategy for the long run

Managed services make the most of Microsoft Azure

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If 2017–18 was a race for companies looking to capitalize on cloud computing, many of them crossed an imaginary finish line and declared victory. Significant functions were moved to flexible, affordable cloud servers; some executives declared digital transformation as complete with a rollout of mobile data applications or other new capabilities.

However, shifting data, work and company strategies to cloud-based systems was just the start. Cloud features that operated brilliantly on day one may be overtaxed, slowing or vulnerable as conditions change. Some users have seen unexpected strategic or technology gaps where predictions didn't match reality.

Even experienced IT managers well-versed in on-premises technology administration are finding that the cloud is a new frontier of security, data protection, disaster recovery and governance. Companies need to preserve oversight while decentralizing work. That can complicate tasks like billing or chargebacks for client projects when computing or storage is distributed or virtual.

Instead of going it alone, a company's technology and executive teams should have a trusted advisor with both operational and cloud experience across a range of industries. Getting to the cloud is not the same as maintaining security and performance over time. Meaningful competitive advantage comes from a deep understanding of tools, templates and capabilities combined with the ability to deploy at scale and provide ongoing support.

Ultimately, a cloud strategy is only as good as the people who manage it and deliver the IT assets your organization needs.

Cloud management is an ongoing commitment

One common assumption was that familiar Microsoft applications would operate the same from cloud servers as they do on-premises. Consequently, many were not secured appropriately for public data access. Microsoft Azure is a flexible cloud platform that meshes existing Microsoft applications and newer open-source tools, but optimal performance comes from having a managed services partner fine-tune each environment.

It begins with defining the metrics for success—speed of data access, security levels, recovery times—and the operational areas needed to reach those goals. The standards change as your organization grows, so the cloud strategy has to adapt.

Azure's cloud subscriptions and related services deliver most efficiently when you capitalize on a dynamic, responsive team of related services as part of a coordinated plan.

Don't just set it and forget it

One company hit by malware failed to keep an offline set of security keys to rescue its cloud servers. Therefore, it didn't discover those critical files had been saved on a server that was disabled by a CryptoLocker attack until their teams needed to restore systems and could not do it.

Consider an external key vault—a location safe and separate from public server environments. Best practices include testing your data recovery plans to spot any weakness and diversifying storage.

Managed services bring flexibility and spend management to an IT budget that, in the past, had typically consisted of difficult-to-predict, long-term capital investments. Azure allows for new computing capacity or scaling back as needed to avoid expense, freeing up people and resources to focus on what matters most to your organization.

Azure, leveraged in conjunction with the right managed services provider, can enhance several key areas of your business from both an IT and executive perspective.

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Data management
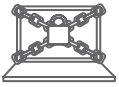
IT leaders—Cloud data has a different set of security considerations than on-premises servers. Public-facing data and secure access requires some new definitions of "users" as well as appropriate protection of data in-transit and at-rest. A managed services partner monitors your environment and backup processes to avoid outages and can set alerts for usage levels and access controls.

Company executives—Wide availability and cost-optimized storage or bandwidth ensures bottom-line efficiency with cloud-based infrastructure-as-a-service. Share data easily and securely knowing a managed services partner can supply insights on workloads and data use. To have maximum impact, data should be secured and shared with internal users and with outside clients, trusted partners or suppliers.

Performance audits and spend monitoring

IT leaders—How often are you testing or recalibrating cloud environment metrics? Changes in even seasonal business levels can affect storage, speed, data use charges and security. Benchmarking your cloud services and user satisfaction is important to optimizing your investment. Your managed services partner can provide data-driven performance indicators and manage updates that keep pace.

Company executives—Moving to the cloud isn't a checklist item. Spending can get out of control quickly with users buying redundant apps or storage capacity that is already available. Know more about your operations and IT budget with greater certainty and predictability. See where trends are leading with a managed services partner who can advise on the most cost-effective options.

Data analysis

IT leaders—Coordinate the growing number of subscriptions, tools, external users and analytics without compromising data access or integrity. See data flows from cloud and on-premises data with support from a managed services partner to help track cloud use, on-premises needs and load balancing thanks to data, not guesswork.

Company executives—Put your data to work for your organization, producing faster insights and deeper knowledge. Fuel more innovation and evaluate new ideas quickly with shared data and remote access. Cloud architecture works more efficiently with services that support your strategy and are tailored to your needs.

Disaster recovery

IT leaders—Hidden data access charges or export fees can be a deterrent to testing data quality or recovery plans. Managed services will check that backups are reliable and complete. Governance is built in, which is vital for regulated industries such as health care and financial services. Restoring operations may include replicating your Azure virtual machines to an alternate geographic location for quicker response and fail-over capability that adds diversity to avoid severe weather or regional outages.

Company executives—Have you ever done a full recovery drill to test how quickly and completely your operations can be restored? After all, fire drills are required so your people know how to exit a building safely. Give your organization the confidence to weather an emergency safely without risking data loss. Partnering with a qualified services provider helps you create a proven reliable backup/recovery strategy.

Manage IT on your terms

"Elastic computing" adapts to your needs, so you can add capacity to meet seasonal peaks and changing situations. Prepare for what's next—from security threats to new client demands with a resilient, scalable and cost-optimized cloud platform. Usage-based pricing and managed services deliver clear details about your data, even on a monthly schedule.

Make Azure even more secure

A properly configured Microsoft Azure environment adds identity management and edge security to supplement other security efforts. Protect your staff and even data users outside your organization with Managed Azure Security. Benefits include timely alerts and analytics from the worldwide Microsoft network, such as global threat intelligence monitoring shared by all Azure users and connected Microsoft cloud applications.

Selecting an effective managed services provider

You can enhance your Azure performance with the resources of an experienced managed services team. Free your data to provide greater value and equip your people to work more collaboratively. Qualified Tier 1 cloud–service providers and established Microsoft partners provide the people, knowledge, technology tools and deep industry connections that make the difference in a successful Azure deployment.

The right managed services resource can provide the full spectrum of cloud strategy and advice, from planning to implementation and ongoing support, tackling today's needs and helping to prepare for tomorrow.

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