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Does the Cloud Services Deployment Model Need to Change?

User organizations often require help when implementing cloud services -- a gap begging to be filled.

As I attend industry events, I hear many companies saying that their cloud businesses are growing fast and often account for significant revenues. Yet out in the real world I've seen the struggles that user organizations go through when deploying these services.

Many of those opting for cloud services are small to mid-market organizations. Often they don't have a lot of internal expertise (which is one of the reasons that they are going to the cloud in the first place). They love the idea of simple and quick deployments, with cloud providers taking on the heavy lifting afterwards.

However, many find that their deployments are not as simple as they were led to believe. In general, we have found that customers are not informed in advance of the amount of work required by them for successful installations. And many don't have the staff or expertise to handle the work easily.

Beyond the Dotted Line

For some, a cloud implementation may be their first introduction to VoIP; they may not have the infrastructure in place with QoS configured. Others are surprised by the amount of programming information they are required to provide or time required for initializing and updating firmware before they can deploy phones. Most do not anticipate problems and the effort and coordination that may be required to resolve them. The complications that surround number porting can be daunting to the uninitiated.

While these tasks are certainly necessary, they do take time and effort and customers should be clearly informed in advance of these requirements. However, that kind of information can put a damper on the sales process, and thus delivering the bad news is often left for the implementation team.

Even when cloud providers furnish project managers, those folks often function more as project trackers than problem solvers. Customers are still left with long lists of tasks to perform, and are often without the expertise to accomplish them.

As public cloud providers move up market to larger companies, customer requirements often become more complex. While these customers have more internal expertise, they are not yet experts on the

new solutions being implemented. This creates an even greater need for some sort of assistance with the implementation, so that the more complex requirements can be recognized and accommodated before the new system is live and business is impacted.

White-Glove Treatment

I think cloud providers can fill this gap with what could be premium or "white glove" installation services. While these would certainly cost more, customer satisfaction should be greatly improved by the addition of some technical resources to assist in the implementation. Rather than presenting a list of demands, the customer would work in partnership with the cloud provider's assigned project manager, gaining the ability to learn as it is guided through the process and assisted when challenges arise.

As consultants, we have often filled that gap ourselves with clients that elect to go with cloud services. After seeing the amount of implementation work pushed to the customer, I often wonder what companies do when they don't have consultants to which they can turn.

Providing a higher level of assistance to customers during the implementation process will benefit providers through fewer service calls and better referrals. The cloud does have the potential to deliver quicker, simpler deployments. But those deployments need to be quicker and simpler for both the cloud provider *and* the customer. Cloud providers need to fill the gap and offer those higher-level support options.

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