

The Compelling Business Case for Hybrid Cloud Services



A mix of public and private cloud services makes good business sense from cost, security, privacy, and efficiency perspectives. Here are some important things to keep in mind when interviewing providers that offer hybrid cloud services.

By Joseph Gonzalez, Cloud Practice Manager, Sigma Solutions



Today's sophisticated cloud computing environments have made it possible for customers to choose services tailored very specifically to their needs and budgets. In many cases, they are choosing hybrid cloud services. These services include a mixture of both public and private cloud infrastructure. The public cloud is deployed at a service provider's cloud data center while the private cloud is deployed at a customer's data center.

Hybrid cloud solutions have become extremely popular for some very good reasons. They allow companies concerned about security to deploy specific applications in a public cloud (such as those that are customer facing and contain less critical data) while keeping mission-critical and back office applications in a private cloud.

A managed hybrid cloud services solution can provide tremendous new efficiencies to an organization's IT environment, freeing internal resources to work on strategic projects rather than maintaining general applications and services infrastructure. Complexity is decreased with the latest cloud-ready architectures and infrastructure. These include preintegrated converged infrastructure (compute, storage, network) stacks; virtualized applications, workloads, and orchestration; and automation. Customers are able to control and monitor service level agreements (SLAs) and overall performance for public or private clouds through a management portal.

Perhaps the most important benefit derived by organizations using hybrid cloud services is greatly enhanced business agility—providing greater flexibility and speed. Agility can be a huge competitive advantage and differentiator for companies launching and marketing new products or services, innovating with new business models and partnerships, or seeking to capture new operational efficiencies.

Addressing Top-of-Mind Concerns of Customers

Customers interested in hybrid cloud services are often aware of the concept but don't know where to begin to apply the service model to their own wish list and requirements. They know that they want a consistent cloud experience for end users. Cost and scalability questions are usually first on the agenda. Those are not always easy to answer; hybrid cloud services are both highly cost-effective and very scalable.

Security is still a concern in customers' minds. They want to know how a cloud provider will protect their applications and data and comply with industry requirements. They know how to do so on their premises but are wary of both public and private cloud environments.

Given the sophistication of the latest security solutions within many cloud provider environments, it is reasonable to say that cloud providers can provide highly effective security for cloud resources that are even more secure than many on-premise deployments. The most stringent security solutions and approaches can be applied within the private cloud to protect the most sensitive resources.

Where to Start

Part of determining an organization's readiness to use a cloud service involves answering a few key questions.

- How would new cloud services (whether private, public, or hybrid) affect your organization's technology, processes, and people?
- What percentage of the servers in your organization have been virtualized?
- What percentage are running on physical infrastructure?

If you're interested in looking seriously at hybrid cloud services, another good place to start is to methodically go over your organization's applications. Start with Tier 1 apps, the less mission-critical ones (such as infrastructure services, messaging, web applications for collaboration, and database applications). These may be good candidates for public clouds that are cost-effectively maintained at the cloud provider's data center. Then define which applications should reside on the private cloud (for example, applications and data that, if rendered inoperable or stolen, could affect the organization's ability to function). The experienced cloud provider should be part of this process, making recommendations about which cloud services would best complement specific applications and align with business and technical requirements.

Additionally, a hybrid cloud solution entails changes in processes and operations. So a new IT governance model must be created, with policies and procedures attuned to where applications and data reside. Again, an experienced cloud provider will be able to guide the customer through the creation of a new governance model.

Negotiable Variables

The flexibility of the hybrid cloud service model also extends to options for provider or customer management of the on-premises private cloud environment. The most sophisticated cloud providers offer management solutions that span both clouds environments. A self-service portal enables the customer to manage their on-premises private cloud environment to reduce costs and to post service requests to the public cloud.

But for many organizations, outsourcing management of the hybrid cloud service environment is the way to go. It requires a great deal of experience and expertise to integrate a customer's legacy environment with public and private cloud infrastructures. Cloud providers that have been doing this for years are in a better position to do so.

Cloud Provider Advantages Over a Do-It-Yourself Solution

Consumers have led the wireless revolution, and organizations were late adopters, with bring-your-own-device (BYOD) initiatives now driving the trend. But with cloud services, providers are the innovators. The premier cloud service providers have spent years developing their data center infrastructures to be efficient, high-performance, and secure. They can manage both the virtual and physical resources of their customers, both virtually and in colocation facilities. Their data centers undergo many audits per year to maintain compliance with a range of regulatory guidelines for applications and data privacy. They also have national and even global data centers to serve the needs of the most geographically dispersed customers.

Small and medium-sized businesses are realizing that the cloud in general is a viable option to minimize their capital and operational IT expenses by purchasing cloud services with predictable ongoing costs.

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