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Sharing control of your SAP hybrid estate: what to expect from your service provider

Practical advice to ensure you gain long-term value from your service provider

You want to focus on improving digital business agility and leave SAP IT management to a service provider?

Ensure your partner helps you gain value from your SAP hybrid IT estate in three ways.

One: they achieve interoperability between platforms.

Two: they focus on cost and time optimisation to get to consumptive hybrid IT.

Three: they help you take advantage of automation and speed.

Most organisations today run their SAP estate in some form of hybrid IT mode – a mix of on-premises and multi-clouds. Cloud consumption offers many advantages for businesses – from reduced infrastructure costs to greater flexibility. However, an unexpected outcome of all this diversity is the complexity of managing hybrid environments. Many businesses turn to service providers to run this function. It makes sense to share the burden with an expert service provider, but what should you expect from the relationship?

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According to results from a recent 451 Research report ([Success factors for managing hybrid IT](#)) commissioned by Dimension Data, 42% of enterprises point to cloud management as one of the most challenging aspects of cloud deployment. Nonetheless, more than 70% of organisations plan to use multiple cloud service providers over the next two years. Businesses clearly want the best of both worlds, and an experienced service provider can help you achieve this.

Central to any service provider's approach is the goal of providing value for clients working in SAP hybrid IT mode by solving common challenges that make a big difference. We see the following three challenges coming up time and again, and so it's essential that service providers support customers with these issues.

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Three common challenges your service provider need to solve in your SAP hybrid IT estate

1. SAP IT interoperability

Managing interoperability in hybrid IT is about architecture portability across platforms. Most applications are ‘cloud-aware’ but it’s not just a simple case of a one-click migration from on-premises to cloud – many applications require foundational changes before they can be moved to the cloud.

SAP provides cloud versions of their core business applications with migration tools to support portability from on-premises to cloud-enabled solutions. Although the migration tools are proven, companies are opting to deploy and re-implement rather than to migrate. Ironically, the time and cost to migrate is comparable to the cost of adapting or adopting to the new cloud-aware versions of the software.

An experienced cloud and SAP service provider can show you the right approach and route to SAP hybrid IT.

At Dimension Data, our approach is to help you determine how to address other architectural needs like extending and integrating security management to infrastructure outside your ‘core’.

Dimension Data has proven that we can help clients with interoperability and SAP. For example, when an American materials handling company’s critical manufacturing lines were impacted through an SAP application fault, Dimension Data rapidly recovered the previously on-premises SAP Enterprise Warehouse Management (EWM) application onto our managed public cloud, thereby restoring operations in one week (versus having to wait for an on-premise solution in eight or more weeks).

Following the recovery, the CIO of the materials handling company said: ‘Dimension Data’s cloud offering creates a foundation for us to consider new options that we have not thought of before.’

2. Cost and time optimisation – how to get both from consumptive hybrid IT

Your service provider can help you gain greater control through hybrid IT. The more types of IT environment you have, the more complex it becomes to control. Most established enterprises already have multiple clouds to manage, as well as physical infrastructure, either hosted or on-premises. Those with SAP may already be running in hybrid mode, especially if they are making use of SAP’s cloud-enabled products.

It’s not easy when you’re running in project mode and orchestrating application storage, networking, and security resources in the right order, and in a short space of time across multiple development and quality assurance environments. Add in the fact that you may be running SAP environments that are cloud-enabled e.g. using agile techniques to ensure rapid build/test/rebuild/retest. The SAP landscape then becomes large, complex and hard to manage.

Dimension Data helped a major retail organisation in Australia address these challenges by deploying their SAP Business Planning and Consolidation (BPC) onto our managed cloud platform and integrating this with the back-end SAP Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution. The SAP hybrid IT combination of on-premises ERP and cloud-activated BPC helped the client overcome issues of time, cost and complexity associated with on-premises infrastructure upgrades.

3. How to gain benefit from automation and speed

When service providers migrate an on-premises estate to the cloud there is a form of automation involved in the deployment to ensure rapid service delivery. In a DevOps environment when you move in a dual mode of running operations and projects, you can reuse a certain amount of automation to rapidly get ahead of business change needs.

This was the case with a beverage bottler with operations across Africa. Following a merger, they wanted to create an entirely new SAP environment. Dimension Data used automation underlined in our Cloud Services for SAP to get the new SAP estate up and running in weeks to ensure that they remain agile. The same tools that were used to rapidly deploy the new cloud-enabled SAP estate are now used to automate additional functionality in line with business needs. For example, to enable the rapid deployment of their pre-configured SAP solution into a new business unit location.

We also enabled one of Asia's largest real-estate companies headquartered in Singapore to extend automation in their environment. We helped them run a hybrid environment with SAP and other applications in the cloud by consolidating over 200 of their applications and integrated data using our Cloud Services for SAP. Our services included rapid deployment in a development environment in the cloud and they can now extend this functionality to their existing operations.

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Practical tips on reusing automation

To get your IT to move at the speed required by your digital business, one of the key things you need to do is speed up the process of developing and releasing improvements to applications. To do this you need to create, or tap into, a DevOps culture where development and operational teams are closely aligned and much of the processes of continually releasing software is automated.

SAP's tools, such as Solution Manager Focused Run and agile techniques in Activate support this cultural change. However, a culture change such as this is notoriously difficult, so it may be easier to use a service provider who has already achieved this than trying to create your own.

As a SAP user you have gone through the process of adapting SAP techniques to standardise the processes by which you develop, test and release software. You now need to extend this to developing, testing, releasing, provisioning and managing the infrastructure.

Make as many of your processes software-defined. Not just networking, but testing and releasing software, provisioning and monitoring infrastructure, diagnosing and resolving incidents. Then you can automate them. This will give your IT the speed of execution and scalability that a digital business requires.

What to do with your legacy applications?

One of the main questions IT managers are asking is: 'Could we migrate at least some of our legacy applications to more cost-efficient hosted or cloud infrastructures?' This is a subject fraught with issues such as re-architecting, placement, compliance and performance.

Although SAP has assisted with porting their applications to cloud-aware solutions, there are still custom-developed or associated applications that need the support of a service provider like Dimension Data. You'll find that you can draw on our expertise as we've helped organisations take end-to-end IT landscapes with SAP and non-SAP systems successfully onto managed hybrid IT.

Set realistic expectations – understand what your partnership means

When dealing with your service provider, make every effort to understand and embrace the terms of your partnership – don't settle for service-level and operation-level agreements that only drive rebates when things go wrong.

SAP hybrid IT architectures include accountabilities and responsibilities that cross organisational boundaries and can extend beyond traditional cloud infrastructure to Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) and Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) providers. Having a services provider like Dimension Data that can provide single management accountability and an integrated reporting view across all of these help your organisation embrace hybrid IT.

Enterprises partner with service providers because they want technical expertise at their disposal. Once you've signed up with a service provider, you're tied into their mode of operation. So make sure you partner with a proven service provider from the start!

