Managing the **data centre** in the **digital age**

As modern businesses embrace the digital era, **they need their data centres to be dynamic and agile assets**. They need to build digital infrastructures that can scale to meet the growing demands of new and complex applications, as well as **availability** and **performance expectations** from end **users**. While this digital transformation is occurring, **budgets remain tight** and the cost of running a data centre continues to rise. How ready is your organisation to manage the data centre of the future?

As the race to digital accelerates, the IT industry is going through a massive transformation, perhaps the biggest in decades. CIOs are under enormous pressure to develop strategies that enable their organisations to compete in a digitally driven world and deliver business outcomes. At the same time, they’re expected to lower costs and reduce capex, while driving revenue growth and improved customer experience.

One of the most pressing challenges faced by today’s CIOs is the need to find ways to use data as a strategic tool: data lies at the core of the digital enterprise. But this isn’t just about collecting, storing and processing data – it’s also about what you do with it. Today, the data that you have access to has the potential to fundamentally change the way your organisation operates … and enable you to deliver the outcomes your business stakeholders expect.
The hybrid IT reality

Stuart Fox, Group Senior Director, Managed Services, believes that effectively uniting cloud computing and the data centre lies at the heart of digital transformation. ‘If your IT department isn’t able to provide consumption-based cloud services, business units will take matters into their own hands,’ he cautions. He cites a major Australian bank as an example of an organisation that recently confronted this challenge: ‘The CIO had publicly stated that he wasn’t prepared to embrace a cloud model. However, he suspected that parts of the business were using cloud services without his permission and asked Dimension Data to undertake an assessment. We discovered that his fears were well-founded: over 600 cloud-based services were being consumed as applications by various areas of the organisation. The lesson the CIO learned was simple: if you can’t keep up and stay relevant, the business will simply go around you.’

However, CIOs should bear in mind that accessing technology through a consumption-based model isn’t necessarily a ‘silver bullet’. Today, many organisations realise that they need to look more carefully at which workloads are really best suited to run in the cloud. Yes, they still like the idea of buying their IT as a service, but they’re questioning whether they necessarily need to access it via the cloud. Are all those applications that are running in the cloud really taking full advantage of the ability to scale capacity up and down? Many applications run in a relatively steady state; they don’t need to support varying levels of traffic over the course of the day, month, or year.

As a result, more and more organisations are seeing value in moving applications to a hybrid cloud model that includes a combination of traditional on-premise, hosted, and cloud-based services. This approach eliminates the development requirements of migrating to a true cloud model and therefore gives them a far greater rate of return, more quickly.

Build a digital infrastructure that accelerates transformation and growth

According to Fox, the pressure on CIOs to remove fixed costs from the business is also continuing to intensify. ‘CFOs are setting targets for CIOs to reduce costs by 8–10% year-on-year, so that they can free up cash to fund the business’s growth and transformation agenda. At the same time, CIOs are expected to make the IT infrastructure more reliable, as it’s now supporting mission-critical initiatives. Almost every application needs to run 24/7,’ he explains.

‘CIOs are rising to this challenge in several ways,’ says Fox. ‘Some are considering implementing converged infrastructure within their data centres, while others are relooking their sourcing strategies. They know they’re not going to be able to buy or build the capabilities they need fast enough, so they’re looking for partners that can provide the management and automation they require, at a lower cost. Moving certain workloads to the cloud also enables IT leaders to refocus their internal resources on the big data and digital initiatives that the business is looking for. Over time, a combination of these approaches will enable the CIO to reposition IT as a strategic partner that’s willing and able to have the right conversations with the business.’

John Fiscus, a Transformational Sales Consultant at Dimension Data, agrees. ‘We recently worked with the CIO of a large US building products company, who’d been tasked with using technology to improve efficiencies within the organisation’s manufacturing processes,’ he explains. ‘We assisted him to implement a cloud and big data project that enabled the organisation to use analytics to make informed decisions more rapidly, and eliminate bottlenecks.

‘Essentially the business has moved to a methodology of “infrastructure just-in-time”. Moving to a consumption-based approach allows it to scale its infrastructure to meet the requirements of the business intelligence environment – which generates the information required to optimise the inventory supply chain.’
Complexity and control

When you move to a consumption-based model, your internal IT team inevitably has to relinquish a degree of control of what has become a multi-tenanted environment. Fiscus explains that service providers such as Dimension Data are able to mitigate the perceived increase in risk associated with surrendering control by providing organisations with a comprehensive dashboard of information of the entire environment via a ‘single pane of glass’.

‘The dashboard provides a top-level view of the underlying infrastructure. Having this visibility enables our clients to make more informed decisions regarding their infrastructure, and to provide individual business units with timely and relevant reports. As you build a digital infrastructure to support your next-generation data centre, your environment is inevitably going to become more complex. So the ability to access the right information, when you need it, is critical,’ he explains.

Need for speed

Alex Watson-Jackson, Dimension Data’s Business Development Manager for Europe, believes that IT leaders have a golden opportunity to add value to their digital business transformations by enabling their organisations to take new products and services to market quickly. He cites a global multinational healthcare company as an example of an organisation that successfully revolutionised its business model very swiftly by capitalising on technology advancements.

‘The company had traditionally focused on selling healthcare systems and tools,’ he explains. ‘It was looking to augment its value proposition to customers by adding data management services to its products. Its vision was to not only provide imaging machines, but also supply the images and associated data … and then route that data to the clinicians who needed it to make healthcare-related decisions. The problem was that the organisation was not services business; that’s not where its core expertise lay. It knew that the prospective customers of its new offering – hospitals – would expect an IT service that was professionally delivered and included the right processes and procedures, and service and operational management disciplines. It would take the organisation six or seven months to build these capabilities itself, severely delaying speed-to-market for the new offering.

Rather than invest time and resources in this endeavour, the company engaged with Dimension Data to deliver a managed service. ‘It recognised the wisdom of partnering with a provider that was well-established in this field and already had the relevant tools and automation capabilities in place. It was able to simply build its service on top of what we’d already proven works really well … and transform itself into a mature IT delivery service provider to hospitals in just 90 days.’

Automated infrastructure management

Watson-Jackson argues that mitigating risk is another key element of effectively managing data centres in the digital era. ‘We recently worked with an organisation in the energy sector that operates a number of oil rigs in the North Sea, and oil platforms in some fairly dangerous places such as North Africa, and the Middle East. Many of these locations are physically remote, and often not very pleasant places in which to live. As a result, it’s not easy to find IT professionals who are willing to work there.

‘The company needed a different model – one that eliminated the need for it to keep highly skilled IT resources on site and, instead, enabled it to manage its infrastructure remotely. However, remote management isn’t simple. In addition, the potential impact of IT systems failing at an oil rig could be catastrophic. Just an hour of downtime could result in millions of dollars in lost revenue. That’s why Dimension Data’s remote infrastructure management, and specifically, speed-to-resolution capabilities, caught the organisation’s attention. We’re able to fix most faults within 15 minutes, and 60% of incidents are attended to automatically through our remote monitoring and management systems.’

Best foot forward

In the digital era, where technology continues to revolutionise the way we live and work, businesses in all industries have to adapt to remain competitive and relevant. So too must the IT function. IT leaders need to refocus; they need to re-prioritise their efforts on delivering business value and driving the digital transformative agenda, while not neglecting operations. Putting in place a plan to build a fit-for-purpose digital infrastructure is a critical, enabling step. However, ensuring you’re able to effectively manage the data centre of the future requires more careful thought and planning … and, of course, resources. For these reasons, IT leaders would do well to engage with a services provider with proven skills in hybrid cloud, digital infrastructure, and the network, coupled with advanced management and automation capabilities, to help them accelerate their digital journeys.

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