Is location key to choosing a cloud provider?

Yasser Zeineldin, CEO of managed hosting and cloud infrastructure services provider eHostingDataFort, debates the pros and cons of choosing a local versus a global public cloud provider

I n an age of the internet of things (IoT) whereby everyday devices — from heart monitors to kitchen appliances — can talk to each other over the internet and make life simpler, cloud computing is pushing economic competitiveness around the globe.

According to a report by Gartner,at least 20% of all global cloud services will be disbursed via internal or external cloud service brokerages by 2015. In a similar report, industry analysts have projected that worldwide spending on public IT cloud services will exceed $107 billion by 2017. What's more, public cloud is growing by leaps and bounds with predictions of revenues reaching $20 billion by 2016.

International players such as Google, Amazon and Dropbox dominate the global public cloud market. However, in the Middle East, where concerns still linger over the inherent security risks associated with adopting public cloud, cloud computing is just starting to gain momentum. Outside of the region, recent incidents such as the 'Snowden Effect' have affected a historical market like the US, which has been a leader in providing international cloud computing services.

This poses some important questions: Are regional organisations ready for the public cloud? And are service providers prepared to tackle the new age security threats?

At least in the UAE, this certainly seems to be the direction in which the market is headed. Earlier this year, for instance,the UAE announced a doubling of its homeland security spend with a major portion allocated to cyber security.

Enterprises, governments and financial companies now prefer to keep their data local as easy accessibility becomes a grow-

← Zeineldin: Public cloud services bring cost benefits, but user organisations need to do proper due diligence before selecting a service.

ing priority. Another advantage is complete control, which helps enterprises stay on top of security concerns and conduct audits as and when required.

In addition using a local Cloud provider results in lower latency and faster access to applications as the infrastructure is hosted within the GCC region compared to using a global public cloud provider whose infrastructure is hosted outside the immediate region.

For many organisations, choosing between a public and private cloud is a challenge. It gets even more daunting to decide whether to work with a global public cloud services provider or a local public cloud services provider.

However, there is no one size fits all solution — the same cloud service is not appropriate for every application, user group or organisation.

One of the key reasons enterprises use public cloud services is the cost saving benefits and the fact that one does not incur any capital expenses. Exercising due diligence is a must, especially when looking for reliability, availability and, more importantly, security.

Most public cloud providers claim to provide all of these. However, when one looks closely, it is evident that some providers can only offer security up to the point of abstraction and no higher. The provider will be responsible for security at the server level but the customer is ultimately responsible for security of their own applications.

With public cloud service providers in the same country, one

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→ Organisations need to weigh up the benefits of local public cloud providers versus global providers.

has instant access to customer service without a lag in time-difference or having to speak to an agent in another country who may not understand the actual on-ground difficulties.

In-country public cloud service providers are typically compliant with regulations and follow both local and international security compliance policies. For example, at eHosting Data-Fort, our data centres are based in the UAE and we are certified for international certifications.

Given these benefits, we are witnessing several enterprises transitioning to a local cloud services provider. Custom made solutions allow customers to integrate disaster planning into their business operations to ensure efficiency.

What organisations are also becoming aware of is that critical data hosted anywhere, including in-house data centres need to be managed and controlled via standards, processes and technology. The benefit of outsourcing these to a local cloud services provider takes away the stress of staffing and helps in maintain-

ing fixed operating expenses. All of this can be achieved whilst maintaining confidentiality and high security levels.

The case for cloud itself is not an easy one but choosing between a global public cloud service provider and one that is based locally plays an equally important role in the CIOs decision-making process. One big pointer that determines which option fits best is the size of the organisation. Large enterprises and smaller organisations with local user groups are perhaps better served with a local cloud services provider.

Several regional companies are presently opting for hybrid cloud services — this approach looks like it's here to stay for the foreseeable future. The trick is to cut through the hype and fine print, be aware of organisational needs and better understand the options available in the market — before making that leap to the cloud. ■

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