

HOLDING THE FORT

A company's day-to-day operations rely on its IT function to run smoothly - maintaining a healthy network infrastructure and keeping downtime to a minimum is critical. To date, more and more organisations are turning over certain IT functions to managed service providers, freeing internal IT staff to focus on strategic IT projects.



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Every business aspires to have IT networks that can bring about better integration with its employees, partners and customers. Higher productivity demands leave most organisations facing a fork in the road of prioritising network management and progressing other business functions.

As industries and the technologies accompanying them grow more complex, managed network services give organisations the opportunity to keep their focus on having more efficient business processes.

“With managed network services, an enterprise can offload up front and recurring tasks to the service provider while maintaining the infrastructure according to their availability, performance and budget requirements,” says Sunil Paul, COO, Finesse.

As more and more businesses realise that staying on top of a sophisticated network infrastructure is a pivotal competitive advantage, many of them opt to out-task the management of their network functions.

According to Paul, while the network is a key foundation of a business, organisations may face issues on accessing extra capacity and tapping into new functional capabilities. “Added budgetary pressures and lack



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Sunil Paul, COO, Finesse

of in-house technical expertise are also predominant reasons why they choose to look for a managed network services provider. They also have to deal with skills shortages.”

Rajesh Abraham, Director of Technology and IT Operations, eHosting DataFort, seconds this, explaining that manpower and maximising business productivity and continuity tops the list of challenges that both the enterprise and the SME sector are faced with in their IT requirements. “With evolving needs and limited in-house IT professionals and skills, companies are moving towards engaging the services of managed services providers (MSP) who have the ability to provide different models in IT services,” he says. “With fixed in-house IT departments, the team may not be able to cope with high peak activity, and on the other hand, lower workloads may not justify the manpower spends. MSPs therefore provide a great amount of flexibility to ensure that IT functions are economically run with high levels of technical expertise.”

However, permitting a third-party firm to access your network is often perceived as a big deal, hence concerns are par for the course. “Organisations tend to be uneasy about relying on managed network services providers with critical information and business infrastructure that are crucial to its business operations,”

explains Paul. “They also feel that managed services offer less flexibility and take away the choice of using specific applications for specific requirements, resulting in a combination that may not be suitable for that business. Security is a key concern as service providers usually store information outside of a business’ own infrastructure; this is especially true in businesses where compliance is mandatory.”

When looking for the right partner to manage their networks, IT leaders should ensure that this provider is fully adept in giving secure end-to-end network infrastructure services that are compatible with an organisation’s business objectives. A range of factors need to be considered when selecting a managed network services provider, including latency and user experience, reputation and domain expertise of the service provider. By the same token, physical location of the data, standards and certifications, SLAs, disaster recovery, pricing and flexibility in plans, are all essential considerations.

In terms of adoption in the region, Abraham points out that the managed services market is seeing strong growth. “A 2012 report by Frost & Sullivan indicated that the UAE managed services market would grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17 percent for five years,” he says. “This holds true, as we have seen a huge uptake for managed

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Rajesh Abraham, Director of Technology and IT Operations, eHosting DataFort

IT and cloud infrastructure services by both enterprises and SMEs. Traditionally, large businesses have been relying on the expertise and services of managed hosting providers to offer secure, flexible and scalable solutions. However, over the last few years we have been seeing a growing trend amongst SMEs choosing to work with service providers for their data centre requirements.”

Paul seconds this notion, highlighting that businesses in the region are beginning to understand the worth of modern communication and infrastructure and its effect on business in the lines of helping them achieve efficiencies. “Organisations are also adopting these services to live up to the expectation of the modern business atmosphere of ensuring high productivity, minimising capital investment, saving costs and keeping abreast with competition,” he says.

Managed network services offer companies multiple benefits. This enables

a focus on core competencies without having to worry about maintaining their internal IT environments.

“At the strategic level, it allows companies to focus and leverage their resources towards their core business activities, rather than spending too much time on operational activities,” says Abraham. “At the operational level, it offers the skills and expertise of a service provider to competently manage complex data centre requirements. And, at the financial level, managed IT services reduce total cost of ownership and provide the benefit of a subscription-based OPEX model.

“This means that companies can continue to focus on their strategic business objectives, relocate funds on developing new applications and innovation and indirectly win access to skilled resources, latest technology and best-in-class IT infrastructure,” Abraham adds.

Paul believes that a good service provider will help an enterprise to realise improvements in productivity rapidly, leading to cost efficiency. “Network infrastructure needs to be globally competitive and should be able to deliver optimal uptime and reliability whenever it is required,” he says. “In addition to that, it should also offer the options of diversity in access, allowing employees to connect to the corporate network and access information that is required to do their job effectively – irrespective of time and place. Information which is accessed is invariably secure, reliable, seamless and cost-effective. This increases efficiency and productivity. Businesses get a resilient, robust and secure infrastructure. Typically, a focused managed network services vendor can provide their clients with the specialised services which may be required at times, which would be hardly possible to maintain internally.” ■



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