

# COVERING YOUR BETS WITH A MULTI-CLOUD STRATEGY

Let's face it, it's scary to bet your investment dollars on any particular cloud approach or vendor when cloud technology is morphing constantly. But you can't afford to be overly cautious because CEOs are looking to their IT leaders to steer digital transformation strategies – and do it now. So, how do you balance action with maximum flexibility to adapt?

"The cloud as we know [it] today will change, morph from one form into something else," is the way [Swapnil Bhartiya of The New Stack](#) sums it up. Cloud computing "will disaggregate in the not too distant future back to a world of distributed computing. And then go back to centralized. Like a pendulum."

That pendulum effect spurred many enterprises to spurn mainframe acquisitions in favor of time-sharing services, then buy into minicomputers and now migrate toward cloud. What seems certain today may be more elusive tomorrow.

## PREPARED FOR CONSTANT INNOVATION?

That swing from centralized to distributed and back again is simultaneously exhilarating and frightening. The state of constant innovation means there is always a new solution around the corner that can potentially solve today's challenges. But what if you miss that swing and get clobbered by that pendulum? Perhaps worse, what if you wait for the pendulum to slow, but it never does?

[In a recent Recode post](#), Technalysis Research founder and chief analyst Bob O'Donnell notes that enterprises have moved slower

than many expected in taking advantage of private clouds and hybrid clouds.

"The reasons for these delays are many," O'Donnell asserts. "First, there is the basic question of trust. Many companies have been very leery of letting their digital crown jewels outside the walls of their organization. Not as widely discussed, but equally problematic, is the issue of job security. If projects that IT used to manage are being handled by outside cloud companies, won't that reduce the need for some IT jobs?"

O'Donnell also cites technical complexity and limited skill sets as a source of uncertainty: "Many cloud computing concepts, tools, structures, and methodologies can be very challenging, and traditional business IT departments simply don't have enough people with the capabilities to do the work."

## CAN YOU GO IT ALONE?

As with all things IT these days, you need to look at what you can do in-house in terms of cloud management and what you need to outsource to trusted providers. Do you have the capabilities to hire and train experts to manage cloud infrastructure, tools and application stacks? Similarly, are you up to the task of managing multiple cloud providers?

That's where managed cloud service providers come into play. They are focused on the business of managing those assets for their enterprise customers and invest in the expertise needed to manage the entire cloud infrastructure, including the tools and application stacks on which workers and customers rely.

## DARE TO LOOK AHEAD

Most enterprises today are becoming increasingly dependent on cloud services from multiple providers, often linking multiple clouds and services to accommodate diverse workload requirements.

"As public cloud providers such as AWS, Azure, and Google continue to add new services, more companies are beginning to experiment with emerging cloud technologies such as SDN (23%), PaaS (52%) and DBaaS (38%)," says [Wikibon's 2015 Future of Cloud Computing Survey](#). Wikibon says this shows that "IT organizations are being pushed by development teams to keep up with the pace of innovation in public clouds. It also illustrates that automated, API-driven, software-centric technologies are driving the agenda for future IT projects."

## WHO'S IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT?

Nonetheless, the Wikibon survey indicates that "IT organizations still aren't sure what hybrid cloud means or how best to use it." Any CEO reading that conclusion is likely to break out in a sweat over fear that his future strategy is being driven by a blind chauffeur.

Arguing that cloud computing is now a core competency, Wikibon's Brian Gracely contends that "IT organizations need to accelerate their skill-set evolution to be better prepared to manage hybrid cloud environments, emerging technologies, and the expectations of public cloud 'like' experiences for all new services." The shift from private cloud to hybrid and public models reflects the need for greater business agility.

## DON'T BE CONFUSED

For many, though, the term "hybrid cloud" itself often leads to confusion.

"Although some commentators and analysts still use the terms interchangeably, 'hybrid cloud' is actually a specific type of multi-cloud architecture," [writes Rackspace CTO John Engates](#), who has played an active role in the evolution and evangelism of Rackspace's cloud-computing strategy and cloud products. "It typically refers to an environment that combines public or private cloud services with more-traditional deployment models, such as on-premise or managed hosting, and includes orchestration among the various platforms."

According to Engates, "The term 'multi-cloud' refers to any environment where applications are deployed across two or more cloud platforms. Those can include any combination of public clouds (such as Amazon Web Services, Microsoft® Azure® or OpenStack); private clouds (whether powered by Microsoft® Hyper-V®, OpenStack, or VMware); and dedicated servers."

## WITTINGLY OR NOT

A company may find itself on the multi-cloud path willingly, through strategic choice, or unwittingly through the adoption of "shadow IT" by business units and departments acting independently of IT. "As more applications move to the cloud, it's only a matter of time before all enterprises are juggling a combination of cloud services," [writes TechRepublic's Christine Parizo](#).

Engates points out that trying to stamp out shadow IT can stifle innovation. Instead, he says that enterprises should embrace the multi-cloud state and strive to maximize its benefits. Those benefits include tapping into best-of-breed infrastructure, reducing the risk of vendor lock-in, minimizing the risk of data loss or application downtime due to localized failure, and enhancing geographical data flexibility.

## WATCH OUT FOR THAT MONOLITH!

It all comes down to the fact that a multi-cloud strategy allows you to share workloads across multiple cloud providers and technologies in order to build best-fit solutions. You don't have to bet on one solution for the long-haul. You can instead run each workload where it performs best. You have the option of mixing and matching rather than imposing one monolithic solution. No luck of the draw required!