Information Age

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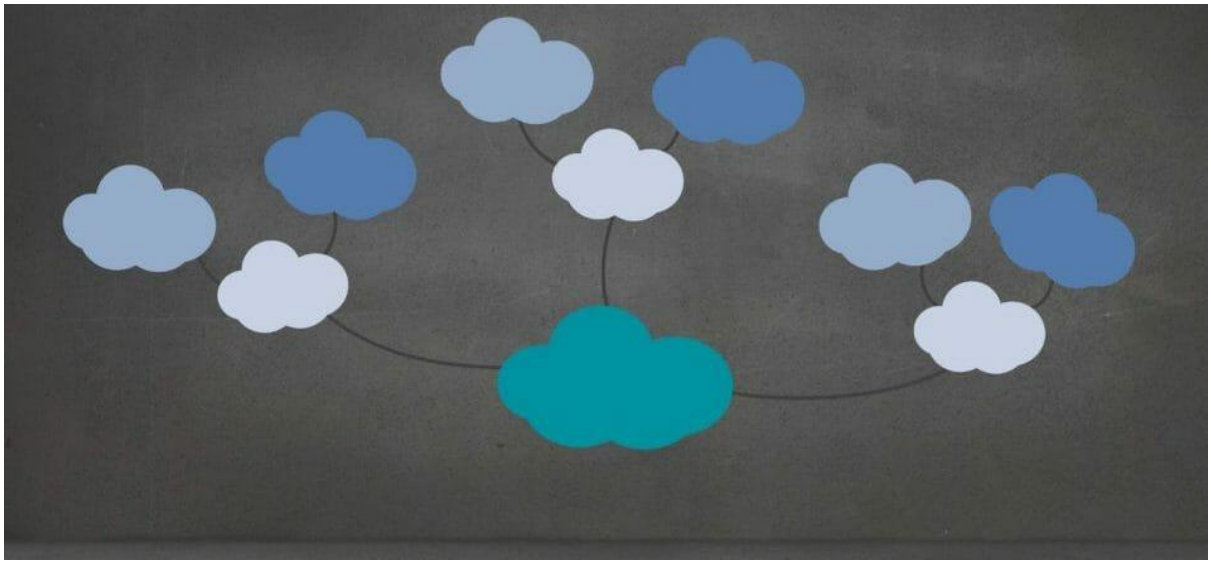
How to avoid cloud vendor lock-in and take advantage of multi-vendor sourcing options

This article will explore how organisations can avoid cloud vendor lock-in and take advantage of multi-vendor sourcing options



Organisations can risk being tied to one cloud provider.

“In the current climate, where the need for remote operations, operational resiliency, cost reduction and the avoidance of cloud vendor lock-in is very high, we have seen a huge boost in firms pursuing multi-cloud strategies,” says Nick McQuire, SVP and head of enterprise research at CCS Insight.

Businesses recognise the benefit of utilising different suppliers and over half are now using more than one public cloud provider. According to McQuire, the moves of major cloud providers is reflecting this trend, with the launch of products like Google Cloud’s Anthos and Big Query Omni, as well as Microsoft’s Azure Arc.

“Customers and developers want depth in cloud services but don’t want to be locked into a single cloud environment. Above all, they want choice when it comes to spinning up infrastructure for new applications, lift-and shift projects or maintaining consistency across their on premises, public cloud and edge environments,” he comments.

McQuire warns, however, that while the market is still very early in its transition to the cloud, “care must be taken in pursuing multi-cloud approaches, so that they are not adding even more complexity to an already highly-complicated cloud computing stack.

“Whilst consistency is key in multi-cloud, there will be those that do not want a lowest common denominator approach in order to support this strategy.”

Below, five experts discuss how organisations can avoid cloud vendor lock-in and take advantage of multi-vendor sourcing options.

Cloud vendor lock-in: the most important contractual criteria

Mitel recently announced the results of an EMEA survey of 1000+ European IT decision-makers on their attitudes around cloud adoption for cloud communications.

The results revealed that avoiding vendor lock-in takes precedence over all other contractual criteria:

• 46% of respondents want the ability to change provider quickly if the service contract is not fulfilled.

• UK businesses place a high priority on the typical length of contractual commitment — cited by more than one third (35%) of respondents, as the main terms they would pay attention to in order to avoid 'vendor-lock-in'.

• The development of cloud-based services and Software-as-a-Service has pushed most companies to seek more flexible and open contractual models, and market uncertainty caused by both Covid-19 and Brexit is likely to exacerbate this trend.

Commenting on these results and how organisation's could avoid cloud vendor lock-in, Richard Roberts, vice president, UKI and Sub-Saharan Africa at Mitel, says: "It's fair to say today that we're in a buyer's market for cloud services. The current business environment means there's more demand for cloud computing than ever, and more competition for customers among vendors."

In this environment, he explains that "it's only natural that businesses will want to avoid vendor lock-in, and shop around for the best tools to enable them to move their business to the cloud safely and securely."

Adrian Overall, CEO and co-founder of CloudStratex, adds: "To avoid being locked into a contract with an incompetent vendor, make sure your contract has a quick and clear exit strategy. Also constantly review the quality of the service you are receiving against accepted outputs. If you are dissatisfied, then do not be afraid to draw a line through your relationship and move on."

Avoiding cloud vendor lock-in

Exploring this further, Chris Gabriel, director of technology at Logicalis, says that avoiding cloud vendor lock-in is about designing adaptability into a cloud operating model.

"If an organisation is running virtual servers or containers, these are moveable between platforms. But that's just one element. Data, security, governance, operating models also need to move. Avoiding cloud vendor lock-in is within everybody's grasp but businesses need to ensure that these critical aspects are also moveable to give them real choice," he advises.

Disaggregation

Amanda Grant, chief product officer at Advanced, says that the more organisation's aggregate the services they outsource, the more reliant they are on a single provider to consistently maintain that service. If the provider fails, the function of the organisation's business they were supporting will also be at risk.

She believes that "organisations need to decide whether to outsource services to a small number of specialists or outsource to just one and risk vendor lock-in."

Grant continues: "For larger enterprises, disaggregation works best. The vast operations they undertake require a level of scalability and expertise that is best delivered by specialist companies.

These specialists can target specific and more complex needs as well as support mission-critical operations directly."

For mid-sized organisations, however, "disaggregation demands a lot of internal investment. They would need in-house expertise to manage multiple suppliers and successfully integrate the services. The alternative would be to use an open ecosystem that brings all their cloud software solutions together in one place. This enables users to consume all of their cloud applications with ease while minimising risk of vendor lock-in," she adds.

Industry use case

John Giere, president of Enea Openwave, explains that in the telecom sector, "a handful of large vendors have held operators' subscriber data to ransom and charged a small fortune for managing it."

But there is good news. 5G's cloud-based architecture is finally putting an end to that.

"Thanks to Release 16 from the mobile standards body 3GPP, there's now a distinction between 5G data and 5G functions. In other words a separation of application data from the applications. That means multiple applications such as IoT or identity can now share a single database that links to a network data layer comprising of structured and unstructured data," he continues.

Operators can now mix and match vendor equipment for cloud-based data management.

"This is fundamental for operators who really want to enjoy the benefits of 5G and monetise the technology faster. Operators can take control of their network to simplify the 5G Core with cloud-based technology, increase reliability and even achieve around 30% savings in OPEX — free from vendor lock-ins," adds Giere.

Success in business

Vendor lock-in will likely impede an organisation's success, because in today's fast-paced environment success requires flexibility and the ability to leverage different technologies at great speed.

Overall comments: "Increasingly success in business is related to how quickly you can leverage technology in order to react to changes in the marketplace. Therefore, you need to be able to upgrade your hardware and software at a moment's notice. That means working with experienced service providers who do not force you down a technological rabbit hole."

Food for thought

Gabriel believes that cloud vendor lock-in is a problem many organisations won't actually need to solve, as they lock-in by design to access the functionality of a specific cloud vendor.

He says: "Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) is a transient scale-up, scale-down, move in, move out platform — but as applications are configured into Function-as-a-Service (FaaS) or Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) and apps are deeply integrated into business processes, cloud becomes as locked-in as any traditional infrastructure or application. We encourage customers to value deeper integration with their cloud partner rather than focus on an exit ramp strategy."