

10 Questions you might want to ask your current Application Hosting Provider

The entrance of 'SaaS' as a term to define application delivery has raised expectations of what organisations can achieve from their investments, this applies both to hosting applications for internal delivery and to software vendors looking to increase market penetration. According to In-Stat, the real world impact of these expectations is that the 27 percent increase in SaaS spend in the last three years will jump to a phenomenal 112% increase over the next three, culminating in a total spend of £8.13 billion in 2014.

Whether these applications are hosted in the cloud or traditional dedicated datacentres the same considerations apply and standard assumptions on the most appropriate technologies may no longer be the most appropriate path to success. These considerations should be rigorously applied to your hosting provider whether a direct relationship exists or they are part of a blended delivery stack from a potential SaaS vendor.

PROVEN BENEFITS OF HOSTED APPLICATIONS OR SOFTWARE AS A SERVICE (SAAS)

So why have such a rapidly-growing number of companies chosen to embrace SaaS - or announced their intention to do so? Both SaaS and application hosting offers many advantages, but the most commonly quoted reasons are a desire to reduce IT costs, to increase business flexibility and agility, and to improve application reliability, uptime and scalability.

It seems that these goals are being achieved. A recent survey by Loudhouse Research on behalf of Mimecast found that more than 7 out of 10 users agreed that their cloud-based implementations had reduced IT infrastructure costs, accelerated IT delivery, alleviated internal resourcing pressures and - perhaps most important of all - improved the end-user experience.

NOT JUST FOR NEW APPLICATIONS

So why haven't more organisations considered this path? What's holding them back?

In some cases, it's a simple fear of the unknown, or the fact that they have had a less than satisfactory experience where a vendor may see their application as nothing more than a set of virtualised bits of data and code. Others may not be aware of the fact that cloud and datacentre technologies have move significantly past 'adoption phase' and organisations are regularly moving their business-critical applications to more resilient platforms with significant cost, reliability and performance advantages.

The purpose of this document is to help organisations like yours who are looking to evaluate their own method of critical application delivery to ask the right questions of potential suppliers. We would like to share what we've learned from moving business-critical applications into the cloud - and to suggest 10 questions you might like to ask as you decide what your own strategy should be.



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QUESTIONS TO ASK A CURRENT (OR POTENTIAL) APPLICATION HOSTING PROVIDER

1. What do you understand to be the key objectives of hosting our application?

Ensuring the goals of your business and those of the hosting partner's are in agreement at the outset and on an ongoing basis will ensure your requirements are continually met. Defined, regular methods of reporting and review are then vital in maintaining this understanding.

2. What recommendations would you make to improve our current service?

Giving your hosting partner the hypothetical opportunity to apply their experience and portfolio to your service will help you to build your ongoing development strategy. As your technology partner they will constantly be developing their own offering and should have more to discuss with you since the initial engagement.

3. How integrated are the support teams involved in the delivery of our application?

Having a clear understanding of where the divisions are in the various lines of support will ensure you can leverage the greatest value from their service. Look across database, NOC, infrastructure and account management teams to understand what elements are 24x7, whether they access and are driven by the same systems, and what support is in-house or outsourced.

4. What is in place to ensure the availability of our application?

You should be clear in your own mind the impact of an application outage to your business, before ensuring an appropriate structure is in place to address risk. Solutions that include high availability, delivery from multiple datacentres and multiple ISP connectivity are critical when an application outage directly affects your business revenue.

5. How do you help us to ensure we are compliant?

All communications and processes that involve external partners can potentially increase the risk of your business being non-compliant and your hosting partner is one of these. It is important for both parties to understand where your data can and should be held, and what type of data it is. Where your partner is provisioning your licensing, be sure to know who is responsible if you are not licensed correctly. Where your hosting partner utilises additional parties in the delivery of their service, look to understand who has access to what data, what ISO accreditations are in place and with whom.

6. What can we do to improve the user experience?

User experience is critical to the success of a hosted application. A responsive, easily accessible and performant system will directly benefit the bottom line. To support this, a mechanism for user feedback should be in place and this is your responsibility. Your hosting partner should then be able to respond with measured analysis reported from all layers of the delivery stack (connectivity, networking, storage, infrastructure, database, application) so that appropriate steps can be taken.



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7. How can you assist with the testing and development of our application?

To mitigate risk and ease development, it is standard practise to perform such tasks in a 'sandbox' environment. Achieving this in your internal network before migrating to a hosted environment reduces much of the risk, although key differences remain that are more difficult to replicate. If your provider is able to work with you to create on-demand test and development environments it could reduce project risk and length considerably.

8. How can you ensure the security of application data?

Data security revolves around control; who has access to what data, where from and what logging and reporting methods are in place to record this. Appropriate technology is important but not absolute, understanding how many parties are involved in the delivery of your service and what standards or auditory procedures they are subject to will help to gauge this. Typically this question is driven by your own clients, and they too will require an answer.

9. How can my application data be integrated into corporate systems?

Effective data integration crosses a variety of technical disciplines, many of which you may not have in your own business. Having access to resource that can understand the relationship between networking, database connectivity and security will have greatly improve your applications success.

10. What happens when I want to expand?

As your business expands, it is important to ensure your application and the required resources can grow with it. Understanding the limits of your service is as important as its beginning, and you should be clear on what is involved to expand those limits once they reached. What are the costs, and how is uptime is maintained if structural changes are made?

CONCLUSION

Working with a hosting provider who can understand, manage and ensure optimal delivery of your application will reap great dividends across the business. While it is important to ensure the relevant technologies are in place and that their offering will scale with your business demands, having a partner experienced in application and database delivery elevates the value they can bring to your business.

This whitepaper has been put together by Quantix, an Enterprise Cloud Hosting and Managed Applications provider. These questions have been assembled based on the development of our client's business and their experiences of working with hosting providers. Quantix delivers a next generation hosting platform that combines the most important elements of traditional dedicated hosting and utility computing to create a platform optimised for application provision.

When looking to engage with a new or current hosting partner the questions provided in this whitepaper will help to ensure you are maximising the benefits to your business that this relationship should bring. Identifying clear business objectives for hosting your application and regularly sharing these with all involved will help to ensure these objectives are successfully met.



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