How agile data infrastructures can save the retail sector

By Eran Brown

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Retailers have been hit hard by the current coronavirus crisis. IT teams supporting struggling businesses now need to switch to maintaining critical infrastructures that support home-workers and enable online models to run efficiently.

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There is an increasing demand to store, access and protect, and to grow on demand based on the number of remote workers and shoppers. With compute being almost entirely virtualized (and therefore easily scalable) the bottleneck has moved to the data infrastructure, as data has more physical properties (capacity, read and write operations that need to move data around).

The challenge of how to increase data infrastructure capacity could well change procurement processes forever. Long RFP review cycles, and lengthy implementation processes are no longer a luxury that can be afforded. The mounting pressure on businesses to respond to rapidly changing sales and working environments require new services to be created at short notice, and existing online services to be ramped up at pace.

There are three keyways in which IT can help retailers adapt to the 'new normal'.

Deliver Flexibility: the architecture delivered into the IT environment needs to be less rigid so retailers no longer need to feel obliged to take a 'one-size-fits all' package. Predicting the capacity required is difficult at any time, and business units need the ability to scale quickly so it's therefore essential that vendors enable retailers to tap into what they need, as and when they need it. Which also means they can pay for the capacity as it is used - not in advance. Just as important is being able to use temporary capacity without having to commit to buy it, to enable experimenting with new business services. Delivering flexibility into commercial models are now business critical.

Guarantee Availability: retailers operate in a high-risk environment, with consumers quickly abandoning a non-responsive e-commerce site. IT teams must build 'Always On' infrastructures, that provide not only a marketing uptime commitment, but also set clear financial remedies on the vendors when they fail to deliver on this promise.

Vendors must demand vendors to demonstrate how their system can continue to operating for days through any type of failure until a technician can arrive to a site with a spare part that under Covid-19 may be stuck in customs longer than usual. But that applies to normal times too: how does the architecture provide higher levels of resiliency to prevent customer service disruptions even if a component fails and take a day to

Focus on Simplicity: time pressures and staff shortages mean that the easier data infrastructure is to install, operationalise and maintain, the better. A critical way of achieving simplicity is minimizing the number of layers and tools technologies required.

The use of one-off solutions that only serve one purpose, or of small scale solutions that require many instances of the same technology for scale just don't serve the business anymore, and are slowing down critical processes such as automation, self-service, faster time to market and others.

In response to the direct need for increased agility, Infinidat is guaranteeing delivery of its pay-as-you-go solution, within 14 working days of the order being placed, with capacity on demand and an availability guarantee of 99.99999% as standard.

ABOUT ERAN BROWN

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