Welcoming a new era of availability

By Claude Schuck

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The imminent arrival of multinational data centres in South Africa to service the continent will herald a new period of cloud innovation. From end-users, all the way through to enterprise-size businesses; virtualisation (and its associated impact on availability) will reach a tipping point and become standard business practice.

Claude Schuck, regional manager for Africa at Veeam

Already the cloud conversation has become an easier one to have with sceptics. Businesses are starting to understand its value and beginning to trust it for more mission-critical business processes. Not only from a cost-savings perspective, but also from enabling business agility to realise new opportunities, the cloud is beginning to deliver on its much-vaunted hype.

Further contributing to the ease of this discussion is the fact that the cloud and the availability of data have become the foundation on which digital transformation efforts are built.

> *The main positives that a cloud-based offering can deliver over physical infrastructure, namely resilience without redundancy, lower costs of ownership, greater hardware utilisation, are delivering digital business transformation, and enabling businesses to adopt more flexible solutions across business divisions than in the past.*

The hype is over, cloud-first is here

The arrival of cloud-based companies that compete against the more traditional incumbents is benefitting end users by adding to the competitive landscape. More choices result in innovative offerings and an inevitable drop in prices. Across sectors, there is also more of a willingness to share data (within regulatory parameters) to provide customers with a more personalised experience.

For example, by sharing patient records (with consent) with doctors in their networks, medical providers can ensure healthcare professionals have access to all relevant information and perform a better diagnosis.

The number of services businesses are migrating to the cloud are aiding in driving further adoption. It is not only a private sector shift as government is also looking at a more connected environment with the cloud being vital to this.

> *In the next few years, the cloud and the always-on availability of data will be a critical aspect for most businesses.*

Decision-makers will change the way they operate and incorporate a layer that traditional services providers need to think about. For example, will Microsoft Azure be a threat or an opportunity to their solutions offering? The truth is that it could be a bit of both.

Digital dreams become a digital reality

Inevitably, this will see businesses evolving to not only offer digital services but become the digital services themselves. Such is the nature of accessibility and connectedness, that customers will no longer distinguish between what is being offered and who is delivering the services.

In this environment, downtime is not an option. Virtualised infrastructure and the ability to run highly available systems are becoming the difference between ongoing success or facing closure.

Of course, this also impacts on how data ownership and privacy rights are viewed. With the Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPI) expected to come into effect in early 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) being enforced from 25 May 2018, customer data privacy concerns will raise the visibility and focus on data ownership in a digital environment.

End users and customers will come to expect having the ability to be 'forgotten' and also be informed of data breaches. Most importantly, they can withdraw consent at any time thereby putting the organisation under pressure to maintain compliance with challenging market conditions.

Improving availability through accessibility

The coming months will see the scale and cost coming down for cloud solutions at an enterprise level. This will filter through to the entry-levels with solutions becoming even easier to access and more user-friendly.

> **"** *It is a given that the cloud will transform Africa with businesses being able to offer a standardised service without requiring the traditional infrastructure of the past.* **"**

While industry-specific cloud solutions will remain, virtualisation and hosted environments, in general, will become part of the DNA of a business. Because of this fundamental change in the importance of data centres, and the growing realisation that a single data centre design is no longer sufficient for a digital environment, it is anticipated that there will be a growth of replication to the cloud for fail-over.

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However, businesses will make a mistake to just assume their data will always be available just because it is in the cloud. Instead, they need to question things like the retention policies of their service providers and how quickly data can be recovered. Care must be taken to not approach the cloud as a 'data backup fire-and-forget solution'.

Irrespective of the level of importance the cloud will play in the business, decision-makers still need to ensure that recovery is taking place.

With data management under the spotlight with the new wave of regulations incoming, availability and accessibility of data will be as fundamental to the success of a business over the next year as is access to the cloud. To not keep that in consideration will cripple some businesses and empower the ones that do manage to make availability and accessibility key.

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ABOUT CLAUDE SCHUCK

Claude Schuck is the regional manager for Africa at Veeam.
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