THE STRATEGIC CIO: BROKER, INTEGRATOR OR A HYBRID?
Today's CIO is increasingly positioned as a strategic partner to the business, on an equal footing to other C-level positions within the organization. The roles of CIOs and their staffs have become far more strategic, with ever-increasing expectations to optimize the best technologies in order to help achieve core business objectives. They are also expected to move fast — at the speed of business.

Yet, despite these expectations and elevated position, the average CIO often is hamstrung with this reality:

- 79% of the IT budget is consumed by infrastructure and essential software
- Legacy systems typically are inflexible and not ideal for agile and rapid development

The good news is that CIOs today have a wide range of outsourcing choices and many are leveraging hybrid in-source and multi-cloud strategies to rapidly deliver outstanding business results.

Gone are the days of the CIO as a pure IT contributor, whose sole mission was to provide technology resources to the organization. The legacy model of the CIO owning the entire IT infrastructure from top to bottom — the data center, the cooling and electrical systems, the applications, the internal networks — does not work for today's strategic CIO. That model was very expensive, time consuming and slow, but it provided the CIO the most control.

Today's strategic CIOs are focused on delivering value, and they know that requires a far different approach. Now, rather than building their own data centers, many are realizing the value of having their servers, storage and networks housed with a third party. That approach saves on capital and operating expenses, but it is just one strategy.

There are other schools of thought that contend that the server, physical storage and networks indeed deliver value to the organization, primarily because of security and control. Others disagree, believing that it is the applications and data that deliver value. Those disparate views are driving the decisions CIOs and their staffs are making regarding what should be insourced or outsourced.
INTEGRATION/CONNECTIVITY IS KEY

Regardless of where those choices land the organization on the outsourcing continuum, integration is critical, and that requires a new strategy, a new approach. It requires a hybrid service delivery strategy, because the organization is no longer using any one resource; nothing is totally insourced or outsourced. It’s a hybrid that may involve using some internal resources integrated with multiple clouds. That changes the role of the CIO from creating, writing and working on infrastructure the business owns to choosing best of breed applications, wherever they may be located. Some might be in the cloud; some are in the organization-owned data center. It’s not one cloud, but a multi-cloud strategy, choosing the combination that best serves the business.

The role of the CIO fundamentally changes from building the data centers and owning the servers to working with customers to choose best of breed applications, some on the CIO’s own servers, some as a service, some on a third-party platform. That approach yields the best of breed. It also fundamentally changes the role of the CIO to a broker and integrator of cloud-based applications.

This hybrid service delivery and multi-cloud model are becoming mainstream, with

- The use of multiple cloud services increasing
- Core applications increasingly being insourced
- Greater growth in the use of third party data centers
- The role of IT evolving to a service bureau function, delivering applications as a service bureau (aaSB)

THE NETWORK: THE CRITICAL LINK IN OPTIMIZING CLOUD SERVICE DELIVERY

The hybrid or multi-cloud scenario depends on robust network connectivity to deliver the performance users expect and require. In fact, the role of the network becomes increasingly important with the move to multi-cloud or hybrid cloud environments. It changes from connecting users to data center based applications, to connecting users within the enterprise to any location, including customer and third party data centers, leading cloud providers, and software-as-a-service providers for non-core applications.

A networking or connectivity strategy for multi-cloud that delivers secure high-performance is essential. It must provide seamless access to multiple clouds, security and consistent application performance. For many CIOs today, the core of their connectivity strategy relies on the public Internet for the switch to access, and integration of all of their cloud applications, wherever they reside.

Unfortunately, there are inherent imperfections in that model: unpredictable throughput and latency; inadequate security; and less-than-optimal data control. For non-core or less sensitive applications, the Internet is completely acceptable. For carrying highly sensitive data such as customer information, billing and intellectual property, the public Internet probably is not the safest or most reliable option.
THE PRIVATE, SECURE, HIGH-PERFORMANCE ALTERNATIVE

The market has a better way to connect the enterprise and all of its users to their cloud-based applications, with a private, secure, high performance network that circumvents the potential vulnerabilities of the public Internet. Ethernet, traditionally associated primarily with inside-the-enterprise networks, today is connecting multi-cloud applications together, and connecting them to the enterprise and ultimately, the end users. More and more, mid-sized and larger enterprise IT organizations are relying on Ethernet to connect them to leading cloud and platform providers.

Ethernet networks are elastic and direct, and they deliver better security, performance and reliability than the public Internet. Plus, they are available with the backing of service level agreements, providing a valuable additional layer of confidence and security.

THE NEED FOR STANDARDS

The absence of clear industry standards has restrained the ability to connect networks to cloud providers in a repeatable, scalable method, a hindrance that the organization OpenCloud Connect is now addressing. This industry organization of market-leading cloud service providers, network service providers, equipment manufacturers, system integrators and software developers is focused on facilitating the $200 billion cloud services market through open standards development. OpenCloud Connect aims to accelerate the use of standardized, open interfaces to make cloud services easier, faster, more secure and affordable to deploy and manage.

CONCLUSION

Hybrid service delivery and multi-cloud approaches are rapidly evolving as the new normal for IT. It’s the way for CIOs to achieve agility, while delivering strategic value and moving at the speed of business.

The role of connectivity is central to enabling these strategies. The industry wants secure, high-performance connectivity enabled by Ethernet networks. Working collaboratively with organizations such as OpenConnect will help industry and the strategic CIO continue moving forward in this critical journey.