

In Times Of Change, IT Can Lead, Follow, Or Get Out of the Way.



Don MacVittie, 2011-14-06

Information Technology – geeks like you and I – have been responsible for an amazing transformation of business over the last thirty or forty years. The systems that have been put into place since computers became standard fare for businesses have allowed the business to scale out in almost every direction. Greater production, more customers, better marketing and sales follow-through, even insanely targeted marketing for those of you selling to consumers. There is not a piece of the business that would be better off without us. With that change came great responsibility though. Inability to access systems and/or data brings the organization to a screeching halt. So we spend a lot of time putting in redundant systems – for all of its power as an Advanced Application Delivery Controller, many of F5's customers rely on [BIG-IP LTM](#) to keep their systems online even if a server fails. Because it's good at that (among other things), and they need redundancy to keep the business running.



When computerization first came about, and later when Palm and Blackberry were introducing the first personal devices, people – not always IT people – advocated change, and those changes impacted every facet of the business, and provide you and I with steady work. The people advocating were vocal, persistent, and knew that there would be long-term benefit from the systems, or even short-term benefit to dealing with ever increasing workloads. Many of them were rewarded with work maintaining and improving the systems they had advocated for, and all of them were leaders.

As we crest the wave of virtualization and start to seriously consider cloud computing on a massive scale – be it cloud storage, cloud applications, or SOA applications that have been cloud-washed – it is time to seriously consider IT's role in this process once again. Those leaders of the past pushed at business management until they got the systems they thought the organization needed, and another group of people will do the same this time.

So as I've said before, you need to facilitate this activity. Don't make them go outside the IT organization, because history says that any application or system allowed to grow outside the IT organization will inevitably fall upon the shoulders of IT to manage. Take that bull by the horns, frame the conversation in the manner that makes the most sense to your business, your management, and your existing infrastructure. Companies like [F5](#) can help you move to the cloud with products like [ARX](#) Cloud Extender to make cloud storage look like local NAS, and [BIG-IP LTM VE](#) to make cloud apps able to partake of load balancing and other [ADC](#) functionality, but all the help in the world doesn't do you any good if you don't have a plan.

Look at the cloud options available, they're certainly telling you about themselves right now so that should be easy, then look at your organization's acceptance of risk, and the policies of cloud service providers in regards to that risk, and come up with ideas on how to utilize the cloud. One thing about a new market that includes a cool buzz word like cloud, if you aren't proposing where it fits, someone in your organization is. And that person is never going to be as qualified as IT to determine which applications and data belong outside the firewall. Never.

I've said make a plan before, but many organizations don't seem to be listening, so I'm saying it again. Whether Cloud is an enabling technology for your organization or a disruptive one for IT is completely in your hands. Be the leader of the past, it's exciting stuff if managed properly, and like many new technologies, scary stuff if not managed in the context of the rest of your architecture.

So build a checklist, pick some apps and even files that could sit in the cloud without a level of risk greater than your organization is willing to accept, and take the list to business leaders. Tell them that cloud is helping to enable IT to better serve them and ask if they'd like to participate in bringing cloud to the enterprise. It doesn't have to be big stuff, just enough to make them feel like you're leading the effort, and enough to make you feel like you're checking cloud out with out "going all in".

After a few pilots, you'll find you have one more set of tools to solve business problems. And that is almost never a bad thing. Even if you decide cloud usage isn't for your organization, you chose what was put out there, not a random business person who sees the possibilities but doesn't know the steps required and the issues to confront.

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