What to Know: Moving Mission-Critical Applications to the Cloud

Migrating essential systems that are up and running 24/7 is not a task to be taken lightly.

IT’S LOGICAL TO START with the easy stuff when beginning enterprise migration to the cloud. But when it comes to mission-critical applications such as an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, determining how best to make the move and how to manage those applications once they’re in the cloud can be a challenge in and of itself.

“ERP data migration—the transfer of data from one storage type, format, or previous computer system to the new ERP solution—is the most time consuming of all implementation activities,” asserts ERP News.

According to the IDG 2016 Enterprise Cloud Computing Survey, 70% of enterprises have already made some move to the cloud. But more than half are still in the process of determining what IT operations they want to migrate. “While traditional cloud models such as SaaS, PaaS, and IaaS continue to be staples … businesses are focusing their resources to learn about more recent cloud technologies and find the best fit for hosting their applications,” says IDG.

Turning to a managed cloud services provider to help navigate the complex issues around migration and mitigate the risks may be just the answer for today’s organizations.

Moving Beyond the Easiest Migrations

Email and collaboration top the list of applications that have either already been migrated to the cloud, or that organizations plan to move within 12 months. More mission-critical applications, including ERP, security management, supply chain management, and product lifecycle management, all fall into the lower third of migrated applications. The sensitivity of the data and its importance to daily operations are cited as the most important factors in determining what to migrate.

Another critical factor is the resources associated with migration, including financial investment, staff time, and training. With many organizations making fundamental decisions regarding innovation and digital transformation initiatives, it’s often difficult to commit time and budget to a heavy-lift migration effort. In addition, many IT executives are still struggling with key concerns within their organizations over cloud security, knowing where data is stored, and fear of vendor lock-in.

“When you’re using a public cloud, you don’t always know who your neighbors are on the shared platform,” says Kevin Diaz, chief customer officer with the global managed IT services provider Freudenberg IT (FIT). “That’s when enterprises look to vendors like us to come in and help put governance and other additional security measures around their digital assets.”

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Many enterprises want to move mission-critical applications to the cloud but are concerned over how their providers can support their needs. Most public cloud providers don’t offer managed services.

The Learning Curve of Cloud Management

A mission-critical system migration can be risky and costly if done incorrectly. At best, it's a formidable undertaking, and nobody wants to be at fault if a fundamental error is made. In addition, says IDG, many organizations are still exploring and learning about the cloud technologies they want to use, be it public, private, or hybrid cloud.

Other factors that come into play are patch management practices and the architecture of the cloud service, which can be more attuned to different applications, operating systems, and database combinations.

It shouldn’t be surprising, then, that enterprises are even less prepared to manage those environments on a 24/7 basis. Scalability goes hand in hand with governance issues as key factors in determining type of cloud and provider, says Diaz. “At FIT, we take a ‘cloud agnostic’ approach when guiding customers,” he notes. “Before anything, we assess what cloud platforms are most suitable for our customers’ requirements based on their application needs and then build a solution to support their applications in the most efficient, stable manner.”

Keeping Mission-Critical Cloud Apps Up and Running

It is a steep challenge to run mission-critical applications effectively and remain resilient in an increasingly complex technological landscape. Enterprises have acquired and learned how to use lots of tools to run their legacy systems, but managing those applications in the cloud often requires new skills and tools.

It’s not unusual for enterprises to stumble into “cloud sprawl” and find their monthly budgets far exceeding initial projections. “If IT doesn’t understand the different pricing and service options, costs can easily skyrocket,” says Diaz.

IT organizations may need to recruit highly sought-after personnel with the skills to manage cloud-based critical applications or try to train existing staff. A third option is to use a managed cloud services provider with experience managing applications such as SAP or Microsoft.

Going it alone may be a steep challenge for many enterprises as they seek to ensure systems resiliency and guarantee service availability to the business. FIT’s Diaz notes that each cloud provider has its own distinctions. Moreover, he points out that many enterprises are running integrations across multiple applications.

Staying Focused

With business goals centered on agility, innovation, and digital transformation, enterprises need to assess how much they can devote to the mechanics of ensuring maximum uptime and business continuity in the cloud, when many are eager to focus on innovative and opportunistic projects that generate business benefits.

Managed cloud service providers offer enterprises an alternative that delivers access to specialized skills and the scalability and resiliency needed to support the business. The research firm Markets and Markets says the managed cloud services market is growing at a 16%-plus annual growth rate.

Inevitable Migration

For most enterprises, the migration of essential IT services to the cloud is inevitable, but moving and managing a system that is mission-critical with minimal disruption is complicated. Businesses can benefit by relying on a managed cloud services provider with the expertise and experience to help avoid high migration costs while simultaneously mitigating corresponding risks.

FIT, a longstanding provider of hosted SAP solutions, provides managed hosting and public cloud options to current and future digital enterprise needs with the experience and expertise to ensure key SAP and Microsoft applications are up, running, and secure—no matter where they are located.

For more information, please visit FIT’s website.