



Have you considered the cloud yet?

A colleague of mine came back from survival training. As we listened to the story of how he struggled to make fire, I got thinking that, from the time fire was first discovered to the middle of the last century, people were getting their energy from their own fires. Providing energy as a service was a huge leap for cleaner homes and freeing up our time. Today, the same leap is happening in computing ...

In order to maintain growth in computing power, there has been a recent move from increasing the clock frequency of processors to using multi-core processors, but this has revealed the fact that the majority of software is not written to take advantage of multiple cores, resulting in the need for high cost software upgrades.

Recently though, home users have started to dig their heels in, demanding convenience over computing power. The growth in the popularity of slower processors in Netbooks has driven the need for software like Windows 7 and Google Chrome. The fact that Microsoft is extending support for older operating systems is another indicator of users' reluctance to continually upgrade. In businesses, the fact that we have got used to having web-based mobile applications on handheld devices means that we have come to expect much more from our IT departments in terms of enterprise services than they can realistically provide. How can businesses be protected from the costs in time and money of ever-changing hardware, software and points of delivery?

The answer may be found in 'cloud computing', where resources such as bandwidth, CPUs and memory are purchased as services. Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2) and XCalibre's Flexiscale are good examples. Based on server virtualisation - the ability for services to run anywhere in the cloud - these systems isolate the service from the hardware, making for an extremely robust and

flexible environment. There are legitimate Data Protection concerns about where the data and services are located, but these can be addressed either by 'private clouds', which run in an isolated part of a hosted data centre, or by 'internal clouds', which use the client's infrastructure. Adopting Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) would free IT staff from the mundane task of maintenance, allowing them to concentrate on more important aspects such as security.

More exciting still is the possibility, if using a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA), to extend services by creating 'mash-ups', which use and fuse content from other available services. For example, data on traffic congestion from something like tinyurl.com/ox32t7 could be fused with your calendar. Future benefits may include reducing the business carbon footprint by using servers located on the dark side of the earth, taking advantage of excess electricity generated at night.

So, some of the benefits found when introducing utility services like energy to homes are now found in computing. Separating the user from the platform breaks their dependency on upgrades and potentially leads to a cleaner environment. And separating a business from its IT infrastructure frees resources to concentrate on the core business. Have you considered the cloud yet?

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