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Karen D. Schwartz

Government Betting on SaaS

Karen D. Schwartz, Freelance Writer, 3/26/2012

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When it comes to SaaS and government, one hand is definitely feeding the other. And I mean that in the most constructive way possible.

On the government side, federal mandates are pushing agencies to move to the cloud if at all possible, citing cost and efficiency savings. The federal government last year instituted a "Cloud First" policy, requiring agencies to consider the cloud before other options. It requires using commercial cloud technologies where possible.

Although there are three basic flavors of cloud computing -- SaaS, IaaS, and PaaS -- the federal government is largely moving to SaaS in larger quantities. That makes a lot of sense, actually. While SaaS requires simply moving applications to the cloud, infrastructure as a service (IaaS) and platform as a service (PaaS) require more trust, and letting go of more control. SaaS is also a way to dip an agency's toes in the water without too much risk.

In terms of the types of SaaS, apps getting the most play in government tend to be those with less sensitive information -- apps like collaboration, CRM, and content and document management, according to a new study from 1105 Government Group. Those dealing with sensitive information, such as financial, health, or anything with personally identifiable information, were the least adopted.

The are many examples of SaaS use across government. The US Army's Experience Center uses a SaaS app to track recruitment, while the Federal Labor Relations Authority uses a SaaS app to monitor case activity. The Department of Health and Human Services has put out a request for proposals for a SaaS system to support data modeling and simulation involving health and healthcare, and the Interior Department is moving its 88,000 employees to cloud-based email. There are dozens or even hundreds more examples.

Vendors following suit
With the federal government clearly on board, it's not surprising that vendors are following suit, not only marketing their SaaS apps to government, but creating new, government-targeted offerings. BMC, for example, recently introduced a version of its Remedy OnDemand IT Service Management app for the public sector. That's no coincidence. There are government-specific offerings for virtually every type of SaaS app, from CRM to ERP.

With the federal government's push toward the cloud, and agencies' tendencies to choose SaaS as the low-hanging fruit that complies with those government mandates, it's fair to say that use of SaaS in government will go nowhere but up. For vendors, the opportunity is there, in spades. For government users, the choices will only get better. Even in a down economy, this is a development worth betting on.

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Re: Boiling the Ocean
I could not agree more but sometimes even enternal cloud provider relay on the external sub-contractors, humans is always weakest link in security...and in some case sub-contractors located at the ofshore Co. and no security clerance

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batye
3/26/2012 8:55:14 PM
User Rank PLATINUM

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Re: Boiling the Ocean

Government agencies that interact directly with the public like the IRS, Labor, Social Services and at a local level the DMV can all benefit from SaaS. They operate a lot like commercial businesses. They take complaints directly from the public etc. The heavy numbers crunchers like the bureau of statistics, and the spooks like the IRS and Homeland Security will probably go to private, internal clouds. The cloud is much more efficient at processing. The cloud uses a lot of cheap processors in parallel - better than those big expensive machines they use now.

Cassimir Medford
3/26/2012 6:09:51 PM
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Boiling the Ocean

One of the biggest problems afflicting government IT projects is the failure to implement large top-down projects. The IT slang term "boiling the ocean" captures this futility, as small armies of constultants and programmers break deadlines and budgets to deliver non-functioning failures.

William Terdoslavich
3/26/2012 1:31:23 PM
User Rank BLOGGER

SaaS thankfully avoids this as it is basically a client-driven development process that comes from the bottom-up. What gets delivered is a solution for one problem, not an attempt to solve every problem.

Not everything should go to SaaS. (I doubt the CIA would want to outsource its computerized filing system.) But for the overwhelming average/routine stuff, the promise of a cheaper solution today thatis good enough outweighs the promise of a perfectm expensive solution ten years from now.

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Re: State and Local

yes, agree but only time will tell if transparency and privacy could get implimented right way :)

batye
3/26/2012 9:38:51 AM
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Re: State and Local

Given the need for transparency and privacy, it will be interesting to see how the cloud option plays out in the public sector, particularly at the state and local level. It IS promising, I agree.

MarilynC
3/26/2012 9:35:34 AM
User Rank STEEL

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Re: State and Local

could not agree more, for example microsoft with it monthly email letters for IT gov. workers... trying to promote it cloud agenda across Federal and State or local gov.

batye
3/26/2012 8:59:29 AM
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State and Local

SaaS seems like a very good fit for government particularly in this era of tight budgets, but it would be great to see state and local governments pursue this with the same energy as the Federal government. I know some states are moving aggressively but it's pretty spotty acoss the country, from my point of view.

Cassimir Medford
3/26/2012 6:57:50 AM
User Rank BLOGGER

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flash poll

Other than the US, what country is most likely to take a leadership role in cloud technology?

○ Brazil

○ Canada

○ China

○ Germany

○ India

○ Japan

○ United Kingdom

○ Other (tell us on the message board)

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