2018: The Year of Getting Your Head in the Cloud

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The enterprise, regardless of industry or size, is undergoing a transformation like no other. We are seeing the number of connected devices and need for real-time transmission between devices sky rocket. Employees need access to information anywhere and at any time. Companies are looking to adopt technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to make smarter decisions. And data proliferation is occurring to the point where companies must re-strategize how to manage data better.

This transformation brings new opportunities and considerations as businesses move forward on their transition to the cloud, and see the financial impact the cloud can make. In fact, IDC estimates that worldwide whole cloud revenues will reach $564 billion in 2021, more than double those of 2016. The reason for this drastic migration is fueled by a number of factors – digital transformation, the need to innovate and cost optimization.

Digital Transformation

What came first – did cloud set the stage for the digital era or did digital force cloud adoption? It's hard to say for sure; however, we know 2018 will continue to accelerate the rate of cloud adoption and there is no sign of that slowing down.

The digital transformation enabled by the cloud will continue to grow as companies find new ways to connect smart "things" and gather insights based on those connections. The shift to digital offers the potential for businesses to interact with customers in ways never thought possible. However, to maximize these connected experiences, you need a platform utilizing Edge and Cloud to provide a seamless experience. For example, imagine walking into a retailer and the associate already knows your buying preferences and clothing size and instantly becomes a personal stylist. Then, after shopping, the checkout process is expedited by completing the transaction via a mobile app, providing an experience which would not be possible without these advances.

Innovation

Cloud is truly a petri dish for innovation. It provides businesses with the ability to rapidly deploy new technologies and meet customer demand. The days of having an idea and waiting 9-12 months for development and deployment are gone. Now cloud service providers are fueling business innovation and differentiating themselves with unique software and applications that can be customized to meet a specific business need. This is giving business customers immediate access to the latest and greatest technologies, like artificial intelligent for example, and allows them to innovate on top of their own platforms.

It's becoming clearer that the agility the cloud provides is critical to stay competitive in today's business environment and we can only expect that it will continue to accelerate innovation across many industries more quickly than we have ever seen before.

Optimization

Enterprises are also looking to the cloud for cost optimization and business agility. According to IDC, 41.5% of companies cite improved staff productivity as a reason to move to the cloud. For example, as an organization grows, it provides the flexibility to quickly deploy new services and tools, which businesses can scale up and down based on their unique needs.

With the traditional workplace transitioning to a combination of remote and onsite employees, cloud-based productivity tools and services are enabling workforce collaboration and reducing costs. Employees can now collaborate on the go accessing important data more securely from anywhere in the world.

Key Considerations for 2018

Many companies are just beginning their transition to the cloud, while others are well on their way. Regardless of where you are in your journey, there are a number of considerations to keep in mind as you continue on your transition:

- The cloud allows companies to centralize and manage big data more effectively than ever before. Technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning can create opportunity for businesses to aggregate data and gain new, valuable insights about their customer base's buying and spending behavior, market trends and more. It's important to note that artificial intelligence is as only smart as the people behind it. Artificial intelligence is a powerful tool that, when combined with human analysis and instruction, can pave the way for businesses to make decisions much more effectively and become smarter on how they execute their business plans.

- The intersection of edge computing and the cloud is going to be a topic that will continue to gain focus on 2018. The edge will bridge both the customer premises and the cloud together, providing the performance and speeds needed to support highly distributed applications. This includes technologies on the forefront of innovation such as augmented reality, smart screens, robotics, drones and much more. These technologies will create more endpoints and require high bandwidth and low latency response times. This is where the intersection of cloud and edge will play a critical role in how we process data and provide customers with near real-time experiences. Without the edge and cloud each playing their own critical role, many of these technologies could not perform at the speed and performance required to be successful for business applications.

- Cybersecurity must be a top priority for all businesses moving to the cloud. In fact, cybersecurity is still a major concern for many companies when looking to make their migration to the cloud. Regardless of where you are in your journey, changes and enhancements to your security architecture and policies is essential. You need to ensure you have the tools, people, and processes well aligned to provide end to end protection. No two businesses are alike; however, it's important to start by reviewing your cybersecurity posture, which may result in the need for significant changes to your internal architecture. Additionally, consider solutions like VPN to help you protect access to your cloud services. Automated threat management systems can provide real-time insight and flag irregular activity that could prevent potential damage.

- The key to cloud adoption is planning and patience. It's critical to invest the time in creating your cloud map with a multi-year approach to migrating over time. It doesn't matter where you are in the process, and it's never too late to take a step back and get it right. Additionally, it's important to ensure you're basing your transformation on your business objectives. In other words, don't use cloud to define your business strategy – use cloud to execute your business strategy. Lastly, invest in your people. Cloud transformation requires new skills that may not be part of companies' core competency. Ensure they receive the proper training from industry experts that can help transform your business.

As we look to 2018, what excites me the most about cloud is that it's one piece of the puzzle that is driving change both in business and how we live our lives. Technologies are coming together to provide robust, highly secure connected experiences that can provide the business intelligence that allows for smarter decisions and makes this world a better place.