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360°IT – Cloudy, with a chance of disappointment

By Clive Longbottom, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

At last, the ultimate technology solution is here. The Cloud (has to be capitalised, otherwise it's just a bit of air-borne moisture trying to get to earth) has blessed us with its presence, and we can all look to a great future where we plug something into the wall (or even 'plug' it into a wireless environment) and everything we need is there for us. It doesn't seem to matter whether this something is a PC, a server, a fridge or a piece of string: The Cloud is going to mean that everything will work and we can forget about the technical bits and just concentrate on the business.

Pity it won't actually be like that. Firstly, just what is The Cloud? Has it just leapt out of the hedgerows at us from nowhere? Of course not: it's an evolution of approaches to deploying and delivering IT that have been around for ages - service oriented architectures (SOAs) built around web services, sitting (preferably) on virtualised platforms and using slightly more modern glue in the form of security and informational exchange standards to make everything work across increasingly high bandwidth networks.

As such, Quocirca analysts fully back the idea of The Cloud... but be clear we are backing the idea, not necessarily the reality we see today. Far too many organisations see The Cloud as a chance to repackage existing offerings in a bid to breathe new life into them. A hosted version of Siebel is not a Cloud offering - it's a hosted version of Siebel. Something that uses up 80% of a desktop's CPU to create an image backup of your PC on some storage system away from your desktop is not a Cloud service - it's a very poor backup system.

The Cloud must be seen as the opportunity to begin to face down old thinking. The enterprise application is approaching its dotage; the old view - that the way an organisation works must change so that it can fit in with the way its

applications work - has to go. There is growing recognition that all organisations need to have their basic processes facilitated - even when those processes are changing by the month, week, day or hour. To do this requires a Cloud that provides function, not applications - and that for it all to work, we need a different approach at the front end of it all.

In the past, workflow tools have been used to describe processes. I've always had fun watching an average person trying to use these tools - the process diagram starts off okay, then begins to get a little complicated, and then collapses as the user is asked to input the more technical aspects of the flows and branches. Luckily, such systems are already dying away, but the replacements don't seem to be ready to take over.

People understand the tasks that they have to carry out - not the overall process. What's needed is a highly collaborative environment that pulls together individual tasks and creates the overall process - then matches the task needs with the technical capabilities from internal or external Clouds. To do this, we need automated contract management - not just at a commercial level, but at a technical level. If a task requires 200 transactions to be carried out in two minutes, it is a waste of time if The Cloud is providing a function that can only do 20 in that time. We need and expect the full 200 and will only pay if that need is met. We need a standard around technical contracts that enables such negotiations to be automated at near line speed - otherwise we just end up replacing hard-coded application connections with hard-coded service connections, which gives no flexibility at all.

The Cloud can change computing as we know it, if only we all (vendors, users, analysts, media) grasp the opportunity. It will be the Next Great Solution... at least until the next one comes along.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

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