



# IT FORECAST: CLOUDY

**F**or a few years now, many organisations have been moving applications and storage operations to the cloud, virtualising many aspects of their IT environment. What's next? IT-as-a-Service (ITaaS) is now attracting attention as an efficient way to make the most of what cloud computing offers, and may become the new norm for organisations managing large amounts of information.

Cloud computing allows a facility to be more flexible, make better use of resources and scale the size of their programs more efficiently. Put very basically, a cloud computing model means that, rather than each individual computer having a software program downloaded to it and stored to the device, a 'cloud' or bank of servers – either in-house or outsourced – hosts the organisation's applications. So, rather than a library or information service buying, downloading and administering individual software licences for each user, they can take what they need from a central location.

According to Darron Hutchison from Melbourne-based ITaaS provider blueAPACHE, 'this saves the facility both time and money, since they can respond quickly and efficiently

to changes in staff and work structures, and overcome unexpected staff turnover and other unforeseen events.'

IT-as-a-Service takes the cloud model one step further, with IT companies providing a standardised set of services that increase cost efficiencies and provide an agile platform for better management of resources.

Under an ITaaS operating model, the cloud can essentially be configured to suit the needs of the individual facility, so capacity can be up-scaled or downsized to meet the demands of the library or information service. This ultimately flexible model is becoming increasingly mainstream, as modern demands call for seamless IT performance and reliability, with applications delivered on demand. This also results in an operating model that is generally more robust than others, since it allows performance to be upgraded, as well as capacity.

Security is also managed by the service provider, providing an economy of scale that allows for a state of the art, enterprise-level security solution to be applied to a smaller facility. This of course means that security will be more robust

without the facility having to spend an enormous amount of money. Security can be centrally managed by the service provider, which allows one simple, high level solution to be administered across all devices and the network as a whole, and places the responsibility on the provider to ensure that the client's data is safe at all times.

ITaaS moves the onus of providing these reliable, flexible services away from an IT department as we know it today. Since ITaaS involves a third party coming in and delivering the agreed range and scope of IT services, the role of the existing IT department evolves into more of a commissioning role. The IT department collaborates with the service provider to evaluate what services the facility requires, then the service provider will go away and work out what sort of framework is best for the particular set of circumstances in front of them.

This model tends to simplify the range of applications and services operating within an IT network, since it forces standardisation upon the facility.

There can be one agreed set of applications, which are centrally controlled and administered, rather than a vast array of individually downloaded programs each with their own licencing and deployment dates.

'Customers and staff expect fast and trouble-free performance from a facility's IT network these days, and functionality definitely tends to increase under an ITaaS model, since it essentially clears away the dead wood from an IT network and allows simple increases in capacity and performance,' explains Darron.

Since a third party is controlling the flow of resources (after the IT department has indicated what the library or facility requires to operate) the burden of providing those services in an efficient and cost effective manner moves to the service provider. Since the service provider is working in a competitive space, the onus to provide the services as cheaply and efficiently as possible drives them to come up with the goods, or the facility can move to a new provider.

Changes in scale – for example if the library expands operations or increases staff – can be quickly accounted for by the service provider in this model and the cost per staff member ratio increases by exactly the amount of budget devoted to each individual.

Libraries and information services may benefit from moving to an ITaaS model, setting up a number of organisational efficiencies and cost savings, at the same time as reducing the workload of IT staff. Migrating a library's IT operations to an ITaaS model has the potential to provide a more agile, customer-focused experience, which fully leverages cloud computing options. It can save time and money, and mitigate many of the hassles associated with running a complex IT environment.

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