

What's Your Cloud Migration Strategy? A Primer for Success

Most companies are moving on-premise applications to the cloud. Like any change, the process requires forethought and strategy.

CLOUD MIGRATION IS WELL UNDERWAY: 59% of IT leaders across industries say they have already moved applications to the cloud, according to a new study by IDG Research Services. Furthermore, the remaining 41% are either in the process of or planning cloud migrations.

While the cloud offers significant business benefits, it's apparent from the research that many companies, especially midmarket-sized businesses, are experiencing challenges throughout the migration process.

In this report, we look at some of the expectations and obstacles associated with cloud migrations, and provide best practices from lessons learned.

Expectations vs. Obstacles

By moving on-premises applications to the cloud, IDG research finds that businesses expect to:

- Reduce the burden on IT
- Improve application performance
- Become more competitive by lowering their TCO
- Improve customer support
- Save on CapEx
- Speed business processes

When asked which aspects of moving an on-premises app to the cloud was challenging, IT leaders essentially said “all of it” (Figure 1).

Specifically, they're struggling with issues such as ensuring data security and protection; establishing a strategy and timeline; and ensuring application performance.

Midmarket firms are also bumping up against IT challenges associated with a lack of their staff's time, cloud knowledge, and experience, as well as the need for new skills—all of which runs counter to the No. 1 reason they're moving to the cloud: to reduce the burden on IT, cited by 74% of respondents.

The Need for Strategy

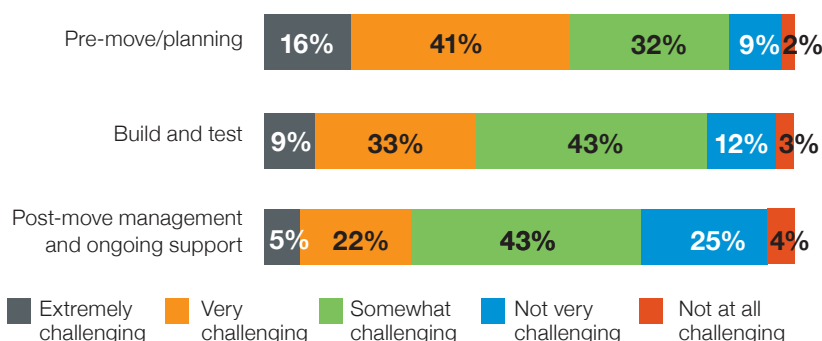
What are lessons learned from these cloud migrations? How can companies avoid some or all of the challenges?

One of the survey respondents, an IT executive in the insurance industry, says it's helpful to start small. He found that by initially migrating less critical projects to the cloud, his company was able to gain experience and a comfort level. One of the big takeaways, he says was: “Every step [in the process] deserves attention.”

That's why it's important to first develop an application migration strategy that accounts for:

- Sensitivity of data
- The application's importance to daily business operations
- Ease of use of cloud versus what you're using now
- The cost of migration, including doing it all in-house or using a third-party provider

Fig 1. Stages of Cloud Migration: Challenging Aspects

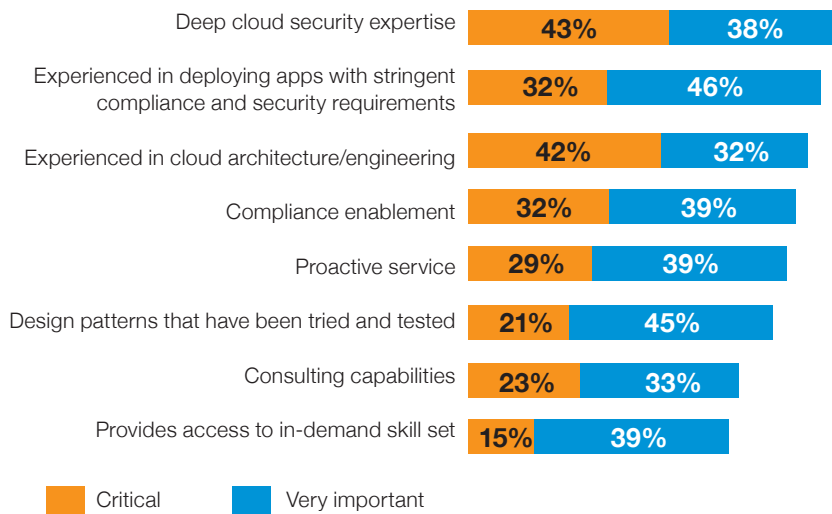


Source: IDG Research, March 2017

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Fig 2. Important Provider Considerations of IT Guidance and Support



Source: IDG Research, March 2017

Next, turn to experts to help you launch and achieve your strategic goals. Indeed, IDG survey respondents have said they are seeking a broad range of expertise from third-party providers — all with the common theme of IT guidance and support (Figure 2).

A Cloud Migration Strategy

It is evident from the research that organizations need more than a “lift and shift” mentality. With that in mind, here are three criteria on which to base your cloud migration strategy:

1. Planning and preparation. As we’ve seen in Figure 1, planning is the hardest part. Start with a roadmap based on business objectives, vision, and the ability to scale. For example, is your objective to accommodate more customers? Take your business global? Provide for an increase in user mobility and access? Improve data flow? Be sure to identify your main use cases for the cloud.

Next, decide which applications are most appropriate for migration and assess what is gained by moving them off premises — for example, improvement to security, functionality, or performance.

The right partner will understand your objectives and applications. They will craft an ar-

chitectural design strategy based on a proven track record to save you time and resources.

2. Seasoned support. To truly unburden your IT resources, consider including compliance, security, and troubleshooting.

Doing this all in-house can be a heavy lift for any company. For midmarket firms, the focus is even sharper: Their No. 1 challenge with hosting apps in the cloud is the need for training and IT skills. Important support questions include: Are your support needs 24/7/365? Has your inability to increase support hurt your customer experience?

“Initially we thought we could just use [the MSP’s] assistance during planning and then we would execute on our own. It hasn’t worked out that way,” says the survey respondent. His company found it needed ongoing support and guidance, “which has actually benefited us.”

3. Proactive service. Visibility is critical throughout the migration process and once in the cloud. This is especially important as it relates to security and compliance.

A partner can offer predictable costs and reduce CAPEX for ongoing management of monitoring, recovery, tech support, patching, backup and security.

“We have had a few hiccups along the way, and our MSP was able to identify them before we even realized they existed,” says the survey respondent. “This is where having trust in their advice has proven important. For instance, they had a far better understanding of the security constraints and identified potential issues early on.”

Bottom Line

Cloud migration makes good business sense. But the process is not one-size-fits-all with one clear-cut path. Applications and business requirements vary.

That’s why it’s important to develop a migration strategy and streamline the process with a true partner that goes beyond the “lift and shift” philosophy. These relationships provide ongoing services at a predictable cost that not only reduce the burden on internal IT resources, but also — and more importantly — enable the business to achieve all the critical benefits and economies of scale the cloud brings. ■

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