

Top 6 Must-Haves to Succeed in Cloud Service Commerce

Given the flexibility and cost-effectiveness of the cloud, an increasing number of companies are turning to cloud-based services. In fact, analysts predict that businesses will spend \$127 billion on public cloud services by 2018, a growth rate that is six times faster than the IT industry overall.

The rapid adoption of cloud services—including email, CRM, storage, productivity tools, and other applications—presents an ideal opportunity for providers to become the cloud service partner of choice for their customers. Indeed, a recent survey found that 63 percent of companies want one source for all of the cloud services used across their businesses.

To successfully offer cloud services, however, providers need several key features and functionalities that ensure a seamless experience for both their customers and their internal teams. Here are the top six must-haves for successful cloud service sales and distribution.



1. A Compelling Product Catalog

Offer your customers what they want, and they will buy. It seems simple, but the reality is much tougher, especially when it comes to cloud services. Not only do you have to sift through mountains of SaaS apps and other types of services—PaaS add-ons, for example—to find quality products that appeal to your customers, but you also have to establish partnerships with each vendor and ensure that their products are properly integrated to your distribution point, such as an online marketplace, and backend systems.

Sixty-seven percent of businesses expect to be able to purchase a wide variety of services from a single provider. With this in mind, finding the right mix of cloud services for your offering should be a top priority.



2. Powerful, Flexible Billing

Billing is among the most critical cloud service commerce components, and potentially the most complex. How do you collect payment from your customers? Should you (or can you) integrate your existing billing engine into your offering? Can your existing system handle the wide range of cloud service billing models (per user, per GB, etc.)? Can you easily add new products? How long will all of this take to implement, maintain, and manage—and perhaps most importantly—how much will it cost?

These are just the questions at the tip of the billing iceberg, but here's the bottom line: A powerful, flexible billing engine is vital to the success of your cloud service commerce strategy.



3. Single Sign-On

Single sign-on (SSO) is a must for a best-in-class cloud service commerce experience for both customers and providers alike. For customers, SSO ensures that they only need to remember one username and password for all of their cloud services, which makes application use much easier. At the same time, providers can use SSO to put their brands front and center, keeping customers in their “walled garden” instead of sending them to vendor sites. This approach also presents opportunities for cross-selling additional products and services to “captive” customers.



4. Easy Provisioning and Subscription Management

A marketplace purchase kicks off a series of backend processes that enable access to the correct edition of the correct product at the right price and subscription level. To complicate matters, all of this needs to happen instantly and automatically, or providers will have a deluge of very unhappy customers on their hands.

A marketplace should allow customers to access their cloud services with a few clicks. In addition, customers should be able to add and remove users—or upgrade or downgrade subscriptions—within minutes, and it should be just as easy for providers to send renewal reminders, expire subscriptions, and other tasks. And, don't forget, all of these changes need to be captured and processed by your billing engine in near-real time.



5. An Omni-Channel Experience that Meets Customer Demands

Many cloud-based applications are self-service products, but most customers still want a personalized touch when it comes time to buy. In fact, 84 percent of customers said they prefer to purchase cloud services from an established provider that they trust. To meet this demand, your cloud service commerce solution should support every channel to reach customers, including inside sales, resellers, online, and even in-store sales.

This omni-channel experience not only drives revenue and maximizes cross-sell and upsell opportunities, but also helps ensure that your brand is seen as a trusted leader in cloud services.



6. Industry-Standard Security

Despite the popularity of the cloud, security remains a perennial concern. In fact, a recent report found that security is still the number one objection to cloud adoption across companies of all sizes. For this reason, providers must adopt industry-standard security protocols, including PCI DSS (the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard), or work with technology partners who do. Marketplaces will handle sensitive credit card information, and it only takes a single breach to do serious damage to the reputation of any provider, no matter how well-known and trusted. Don't take unnecessary risks; make sure security is a top priority for your cloud service commerce offering.

AppDirect can help providers overcome these barriers quickly and cost effectively. We power marketplaces, billing and distribution, and reseller services for businesses in a range of industries, including telecom, financial services, cloud infrastructure and deployment, and more. Our technology offers centralized billing, identity management, and automation solutions that can greatly accelerate time to market, expand your cloud service ecosystem, and engage your customers.

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