

How To Develop Your Business Strategy For Selling Cloud Computing Solutions

By Robin Robins, Creator of the Cloud Integrator Blueprint

Once you're "sold" on the idea of delivering cloud-based networks and services to your clients, the next really big question is, "How do I build the platform, staff, solution stack and automate the delivery and support?" Good question...but answering it requires a bit more strategic thinking.

First you have to decide what your cloud strategy is. Will it be to bundle and deliver a simple packaged cloud solution of hosted Exchange, Office 365, spam filtering, storage and SharePoint, or will it be a "total" cloud solution where you are hosting and integrating multiple servers, Office, LOB (line of business) and vertical applications, web site hosting, e-mail, help desk support, custom development and delivery of the desktop information to various devices (laptops, smart phones, iPads, workstations, etc.)?

Your cloud strategy will be determined by the target market you are serving and the profits you want to generate. The more complex the solution, the less competition you'll have which means you can command a higher profit margin. Here's a quick 5 option breakdown of options you can choose from, and a quick overview of the pros and cons of each:

1. Colocation in a data center
2. Establish your own data center
3. Purchase resources from IaaS provider
4. Purchase resources from Cloud Broker
5. Partner with Cloud Aggregator

Colocation In A Data Center: This is the most basic of basic options and really would be a "blank slate" for you to work from. The biggest problem with this option is that you have to completely self-assemble the rest of the platform. Almost all data centers will allow you to purchase collocated space and shared connectivity, so this doesn't give you any advantage to delivering cloud computing solutions to your small and medium business clients.

Build Your Own Data Center: The only upside here is that you get a high degree of control. In exchange for this control, you take on a ton of costs and risks, plus you'll need the skills to operate a high security, high availability environment. This also doesn't give you any advantage in terms of making money selling cloud computing solutions to your clients, so you need to carefully weigh the pros and cons of going this route for delivering cloud solutions.

Purchase Resources From An IaaS Provider: This includes Amazon AWS, Microsoft Azure, Hexagrid, etc. The pluses include no up-front investment and relatively easy set up. However,

you STILL need to self-assemble the rest of the platform and there's a low degree of integration, so you're going to have to invest heavily in engineering labor.

Purchase Resources From A Cloud Broker: A cloud broker is similar to an Apps Store. They offer a wide range of products and will streamline (aggregate) your billing, but they still offer very little integration of all the different pieces you'll need to deliver cloud computing to your clients. Cloud brokers include Ingram Micro's Cloud, Synnex, etc.

Partner With A Cloud Aggregator: For those looking for the fastest, most direct and easiest way to start offering cloud solutions, this is the best choice. A good cloud aggregator will offer you a tightly integrated platform, greatly reducing the amount of engineering labor you'll need to get started. You'll also benefit from shared resources AND they should provide you with some type of business consulting on how to sell cloud solutions. The only downside is that you'll have to align with their product stack; if you don't like their product stack, you're out of luck. The upside of this "fixed" platform, however, is that you get tremendous integration. Companies offering these services include OS33, PointClickWork, Thinkgrid and of course, Channel Cloud.

Fair Warning! Whichever one you choose, make sure you explore all your options first and fully educate yourself on each one. Once you choose an option and start the process of onboarding clients, it will be difficult to move them to another later on.