Utility computing lets companies turn over IT chores to the experts

What small business doesn't have a "can't live with information technology, can't live without IT" view of technology? On the one hand, the company is Internet-connected with the world and software has revolutionized how it runs its business.

On the other hand, it constantly faces issues about security, availability, upgrades, network downtime, support, access to remote offices, scalability and seemingly nonstop costs for hardware, software and fixing yet another problem.

UTILITY COMPUTING

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Utility computing is leveling the technology playing field for small and medium-sized businesses by providing them the same infrastructure as large enterprise organizations without the hassles, inconvenience and expense of purchasing and maintaining it themselves.

BILLING BY USAGE

As more companies adopt utility computing, it's important to recognize that the purpose isn't to make companies more technology-enabled or reach new techno-heights. It's "Pay–as–you–go" (billing by usage) computer resources, letting companies focus on their core business, increase productivity and grow their office without having to continually spend more on IT while getting less value for their efforts.

Without a large IT staff on premises, small businesses face tough choices. They can continually spend two or three times too much for poor/insufficient operational standards, draining company resources by managing the network internally, or opt to spend less time and money and receive substantially more benefits. Utility computing creates the best outcome by basically becoming the company's total IT network and network administrator.

SHARED SERVICES PLATFORM

Not to be confused with an application service provider, utility computing is not about access to applications (although that access is provided, too). Rather it's about access to a complete network through a shared services platform at a data center that allows secure administration for multiple business networks.

This means that built-in services which small businesses and their users receive include network support, redundant high speed servers, daily data back-up and off-site storage, 24/7 monitoring and support, high speed Internet access as well as e-mail accounts and Internet domain. Windows upgrades, along with access to all MS Office applications, virus protection and operating system licenses are included with additional Windows applications layered on as needed.

Therefore, the utility computing service provider not only becomes the customer's network administrators, as noted, but also its chief security officer, managed service provider and full-service help desk. That includes the service provider's staff actively monitoring all the servers and other equipment proactively to catch problems before they actually occur. And, with full redundancy, if a problem does occur, downtime will only be a minute or two versus a potentially much longer period of time.

Because the total infrastructure is delivered to the client through a thin client session, the user's desktop is accessible from anywhere/anytime. Further, support and all upgrades are remotely managed and seamless to the user.

And, for anyone still concerned about a shared data platform, in fact data is tightly controlled and highly secure — yet actually more accessible. In this high-performance environment, applications are always running at the data center's high speed, regardless of how slow the user's computer may be.

Who does utility computing work best for? Almost any company can show a fast return on investment through a cost analysis of current operating mode compared with utility computing. For companies wanting to focus on core business instead of being bogged down with IT, utility computing is an appealing option. ∎

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Case in point

Company A was continually fighting with network performance and availability issues caused by security problems that outside consultants were slow to fix.

Branch offices had limited access to resources and data was not being shared effectively.

With utility computing, the network was audited and secured, including a permanent fix to Company A's problems. All employees now access a high performance, completely centralized network using the technology they already had in place. As a result, the business now runs more efficiently and employees' technology efforts focus on increasing profits instead of inhibiting them.