Alto Consulting & Training

Cloud Services and Your Legacy Software Applications

Application software does not last forever. At some point, some combination of challenges and opportunities make it clear that it's time to ***retire, replace or retrofit****.*

In this article of a continuing series, we'll make the case for considering ***integrating cloud services*** *with your existing business software.*

Cloud Services – Mature and Complete

Cloud-based servers and services have come a very long way in a short amount of time. Here in 2017 you have an almost overwhelming number of choices, from very low-level services like file storage and identify management, to complex servers for data and applications, all the way to full virtual machines that exactly mimic the physical servers you presently may have.

You can now make incremental changes to your existing line of business applications and gain the benefits of cloud-based computing without the risks and costs of starting completely from scratch. *See the first topic in this series for a complete discussion about risks and costs.*

Evaluating the Cloud

When evaluating a customer's legacy application for cloud services potential, we make a matrix of all key aspects of the application and map them to cloud-based equivalents.

The next step is to calculate the costs versus benefits of each mapping. It's not a given that the cloud always wins. Sometimes it's a draw and occasionally it's simply not worth it to migrate a feature or function that works perfectly well as-is.

The final step is to identify the minimum number of cloud services required to get a reasonable ROI and prioritize the remainder. Sometimes migration to a single cloud service is a good starting point, other times it takes a combination of several services before it makes sense.

Every situation is different and is influenced by drivers like changing market conditions, changes to your business model, pain points in the current process.

Painless Development / Test / Production

From the standpoint of a software development project manager, one of the best features of cloud-based computing is the ease of creating and maintaining development, testing and production environments. Developers can connect to relatively under-powered (and correspondingly less expensive) cloud servers that are known to be identical to the testing and production environments. The performance characteristics of test servers can be dialed up or down as needed for general functionality testing versus testing under loads.

Case Study

A customer was using an Access database as part of their line of business operations. The application worked great but could only be used while in the main office, connected to the local area network. A new business requirement involved staff working with the data while at other locations.

Their first attempt at a solution involved deploying a VPN and configuring client software on staff devices. While this worked, it was a challenge to configure and support and performance was often not acceptable.

Alto's solution was to migrate the database portion of the app to the SQL Azure cloud database. The existing user interface was left intact. Staff now use the application securely without a VPN, and improved performance is as easy as selecting the SQL Azure configuration that fits their needs, providing more memory, CPU cycles and bandwidth with the click of a mouse.

An added advantage is that with a cloud-based database it became possible to offer customers a self-service portal. This offloads some of the routine tasks, allowing staff to focus where they add value for customer service.

Summary

When application software reaches (or exceeds!) its end-of-life, you have many options for how to proceed. This is a golden opportunity to make the right investment in the right technology, and a perfect time to consider integrating cloud services. Contact Alto if you'd like to learn more about these options and get some help getting started.