

DULL AND CLOUDY?

Graham Oakes wishes the cloud was about more than just boring old saving money.



Graham Oakes: enables people to think differently

Does the cloud have to be so dull? For most organisations, it's just about cost savings. Few applications are fully loaded all the time, so pushing them to the cloud makes a lot of sense – you only pay for the compute capacity you actually use.

Clearly, it makes sense – but it's hardly exciting. People have been renting lightly used resources for centuries. Is that all the cloud is?

Well, people will talk about 'agility'. You can bring up servers as you need them. This lets you run large, *ad hoc* analytical applications, or create temporary development and testing environments.

That latter point is especially important – development teams are almost always constrained by lack of environments. Fix this, and you start to speed up application development and integration.

But companies could do so much more than that. Cloud doesn't just speed up the current lifecycle – it enables you to think about a whole new set of lifecycles.

Some teams I'm working with are starting to do just this. They, like most organisations, have started with a fairly linear lifecycle. You generate new ideas, explore them, design and build systems, test, release and repeat.

But they've recognised that this lifecycle actually looks very different at different stages of an application's life. For example:

- **Pre-product.** We're exploring new ideas to see if they can become a viable application. We want rapid feedback loops (hours or days), but can tolerate relatively low (99%) availability.
- **Competitive product.** We're now delivering a product to the main market. We want to deliver new features regularly (eg, on a monthly or quarterly cadence) to keep ahead of the competition, and need much higher availability.
- **Commodity product.** The feature set has stabilised, so we no longer need a rapid release cadence. But we now have much more emphasis on reducing the cost of management and operations.

Different cycle times, availability levels, etc, imply many different hosting environments. This is rarely economically feasible under traditional hosting arrangements. But it is in the cloud.

On the face of it, this is hardly a radical shift. But I think the new mindset, of carefully tailoring the application lifecycle to the market's needs, rather than letting infrastructure constraints dictate things, is going to create large shifts in our teams' ability to deliver new functionality. Not only will they deliver it faster, but they'll be better able to take feedback from their customers and integrate that back into the application.

It's these second-order effects of the cloud – the way it enables people to think differently about how they deliver and manage systems – that are really interesting to me.

Maybe the cloud isn't really so dull after all.

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