SDC CHANNEL INSIGHTS
SUSTAINING DIGITAL EXCELLENCE

Building to last

Accessibility: Why it's vital we build our digital estates like we do our physical ones

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SDC-CHANNEL.NEWS

WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR MSPs IN 2023?

to succeed in a busy marketplace in 2023, MSPs will have to find ways to stand out and become savvy marketers

FOUR CLOUD TRENDS THAT MAY SURPRISE YOU

A few companies rely on a single cloud provider; expect more to diversify and leverage the range of public cloud

2023 IS THE YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY FOR MSPS

Even though organisations are tightening their purse strings the future for MSPs looks promising and profitable

Editor's view

By Phil Alsop

Some S words to focus on in 2023

I'M DELIGHTED to say that this issue of our SDC Channel Insights magazine includes several excellent articles on technologies and trends to look out for during the coming year. First up, there's the ongoing disruption to supply chains, which will hopefully ease as the months go by. However, the Channel needs to ensure that it stays on top of the business of supplying technology solutions to its customers – and making sure that the IT vendors, as well as other partners in the supply chain ecosystem are as transparent as possible, so there are no nasty surprises and, importantly, no disillusioned customers.

Next come sustainability. Channel companies need to demonstrate their own work in this area but there's also a great opportunity to help customers on their own environmental improvement journeys, with technology often playing an important part in terms of reducing carbon footprints and/or improving energy efficiency and the like. Security on the list comes as no surprise. The dangers of being part of the connected, digital world are substantial and only increasing. With so many security solutions available (I think there are well over 100 security categories!), most end users are looking for help when it comes to both designing and implementing an effective, end to end security policy. The Channel continues to have a major opportunity to fulfil this role.

Skills, lack of, is another significant challenge for many businesses right now and the Channel is, or should be, well placed to fill many of the gaps that companies of all shapes and sizes are experiencing at the present time. For SMEs, the idea of directly employing the required number of IT experts to cover every aspect of their business makes very little sense – hence the need for outside support. And even for larger organisations, who might well want to hire their own IT specialists, there's growing recognition that they just might be better off concentrating on growing their business and leave their IT infrastructure in the hands of third party expertise.

Which leads on to our next S – services. Increasingly, Channel companies are turning themselves from traditional value added resellers (VARs) into Managed Services Providers (MSPs). And this is because more and more end user organisations are comfortable with, and see then benefits of, handing over technology solutions (whether it be security, storage, networks, compute, data analytics and the like) to be run by technology experts. This doesn't mean they will abandon any interest in the subject of IT, rather require a range of third party organisations to help design a comprehensive, resilient and cost-effective IT infrastructure that delivers for the business, and then deliver many, if not all, of the key aspects of this solution. Managed services and the cloud continue to be very big business for the Channel.

With apologies, my final S stands for 'Sci-Fi' – a somewhat tenuous link to the world of AI, Machine Learning, Virtual and Augmented Reality, Robotic Process Automation, IoT and other futuristic technologies which are beginning to find a role in the workplace. Right now, many end users are still trying to understand these technologies and what benefits they can, or can't, provide to the business. ChatGPT might be the current 'craze', but there are any number of intelligent automation solutions which can bring benefits to a business. And who better to explain these benefits, and the technologies behind them, than the Channel?

And all of the above means that it's time for Channel companies to stop talking about themselves as 'trusted partners', and time to promote their expertise as 'strategic partners'!

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Channel leaders applaud a people-first culture

Agilitas launches 'EVOLVE for Your People' Report.

AGILITAS IT SOLUTIONS has launched its 'EVOLVE for Your People' report. This guide forms the latest instalment in its Technology Channel insight campaign, 'EVOLVE - Voice of the Channel', which continues to provide actionable, free-to-view market insights.

The report, which explores the findings of the latest research commissioned by Agilitas, discusses how changing business models, implementing initiatives and transforming organisations can help Channel firms take the next steps to becoming more people-centric whilst still continuing to drive profits and achieve net zero targets.

With the UK now facing 'The Great Resignation', organisations in the Technology Channel are navigating challenges both in keeping staff and finding new talent in a competitive market where the level of open vacancies is the highest on record. However, it is encouraging to see that business leaders have strong confidence in the Channel's ability to attract and retain talent, ranking at 7.8 out of 10, with 64% scoring 8 or above on the scale.

The report also revealed optimism from Channel businesses in relation to having the right recruitment policies in place to maximise their position, with confidence in this area reaching 7.6 on the barometer. This demonstrates that many companies have shifted their recruitment strategies in line with their own transformation, to appeal to a wider talent pool capable of meeting customer needs and with new skills fulfilling emerging technology-based roles.

Workplace culture across the Technology Channel is a new theme for this year's Channel Confidence Index, as businesses are recognising the impact that company culture has on long term retention. Despite the major shift, it is positive to see that organisations feel assured in providing methods to support people across their business, with confidence in this area reaching a mean score of 7.9 out of 10 (where 10 was 'very confident').

Interestingly, when asking Channel decision makers which factors positively impacted a workplace culture, hybrid and remote working (39.2%), diversity and inclusion (32.4%), team building or social activities (31.2%), company-wide communication (30%) and responding to employee feedback (29%) rated the highest.

"Despite the global pandemic, the Technology Channel has made significant strides in nurturing company culture and recruiting the next generation of talent. Whilst confidence across the sector remains strong, there are still improvements to be made especially for smaller organisations that have limited resources," commented Bev Markland, Chief People Officer at Agilitas.

"The Great Resignation poses new challenges for Channel leaders, in relation to keeping staff and finding new talent in a fiercely competitive environment. The Technology Channel, however, is extremely open to change, with many companies working hard to ensure they strengthen their companies while prioritising their most valuable assets - their people. Therefore positioning teams as a business's greatest asset, creating a sense of community and building a sustainable culture will be a top priority moving forward."

‘Workplace of the Future’ report explores global trends set to shape hybrid work in 2023

Just 43% of employees are happy with their work-life balance and 30% are planning a career change.

THREE YEARS into the pandemic, businesses are dealing with a multitude of crises and are trying to remain productive and profitable. Hybrid work practices remain complex and both business leaders and employees are grappling to understand how to adjust business practices to meet the needs of employees.

EPOS, the global audio and video brand, in partnership with Foresight Factory, has today published ‘The Workplace of the Future’ report to explore the current and emerging trends shaping the future of work, as well as the technology solutions that can help businesses to navigate a long-term hybrid strategy for a productive workforce. Key findings include:

- **Employees are prioritizing their wellbeing**
  Workers everywhere are taking agency of their wellbeing, both physical and mental, and over half of workers around the world (53%) say they are more likely to prioritize their wellbeing compared with life before the pandemic. As a result, workers increasingly expect their employers to form part of their health ecosystems with 38% of employees calling for their employers to support staff by allowing them time off for mental health needs. A further 30% of employees say they want to see businesses dedicating hours for employees to use for mental/physical wellbeing pursuits.
- **Avoiding burnout and pursuing happiness are top drivers**
  Employee burnout is a persistent issue and 36% of global workers say they have suffered burnout in the last 12 months from ‘working too hard’, a feeling that is greatest among Gen Z (40%) and Millennials (42%). As the disconnect around remote working continues to grow between employers and employees, so does the discontent. Less than half of workers are happy with their current work and life balance (43%), and almost a third (30%) say they intend to change careers to improve their overall happiness.
- **Access to a physical office is vital**
  Employees want to avoid feeling isolated and want to see businesses offering both physical and virtual opportunities for connection and collaboration. Half of employees say they miss spending time with colleagues in person now they can work remotely. This trend is highest among Gen Z and Millennials (80%) who are keen to use physical office spaces to learn, grow, and establish themselves in their workplace community.
- **Employees will leave if they’re not learning**
  The working landscape is becoming more demanding of employees, who are expected to rapidly upgrade existing skills, or pick up new ones, and workers everywhere have embraced new opportunities for development and learning over the pandemic years. Now, 60% of employees of all ages are keen to continue learning, and 44% say they want to progress and upskill within their current job. If they can’t learn and grow within a role, they will leave to achieve their career goals.
- **Sub-par tech solutions can lead to cognitive overload**
  Employers also need to be intentional about equipping employees with solutions that reduce the risk of cognitive fatigue. EPOS research has shown that in noisy environments the brain works harder to focus on the most

  important source of sound with this taking 35% more cognitive effort to listen. Over time this can lead to cognitive overload and brain fatigue, impacting employee stress levels, information retention, and performance.

Jeppe Dalberg-Larsen, President at EPOS says; “The world of work has never been as complex as it is today. Business leaders who are invested in the future of their company and the future of their employees need to think intentionally about their hybrid strategies. There is no one size fits all approach. Though we have, in recent years, seen how technology has revolutionized modern work it is no substitute for leadership and culture. Leaders today face a new set of challenges and must put their people at the heart of creating a workplace community that keeps employees engaged in the long-term.”
Marta Vilella, Client Partner at Foresight Factory says; “Each business requires a unique and tailored plan that considers all aspects of business operations, people, and culture. Business leaders need to tune into the issues, challenges, and interests that most concern their employees and make any necessary changes in order to thrive as a team.”

Growing urgency for observability and security to converge?

94% of CIOs say extending a DevSecOps culture to more teams is key to accelerating digital transformation and driving faster, more secure software releases.

DYNATRACE has published the results of an independent global survey of 1,300 CIOs and senior DevOps managers in large organizations.

The findings revealed the increased difficulty of maintaining software reliability and security as the demand for continuous release cycles and the rising complexity of cloud-native environments create more risk for undetected defects and vulnerabilities to escape into production. CIOs and senior DevOps managers are looking to DevSecOps processes, the convergence of observability and security, and the increased use of AI and automation to balance accelerated innovation with reliability and security. The complimentary 2023 Global CIO Report, "Observability and Security Convergence: Enabling Faster, More Secure Innovation in the Cloud," is available here.

The research reveals the following:

- 90% of organizations say digital transformation has accelerated in the past 12 months.
- 78% of organizations deploy software updates into production every 12 hours or less, and 54% say they do so at least once every two hours.
- DevOps teams spend nearly a third (31%) of their time on manual tasks involving detecting code quality issues and vulnerabilities, reducing the time spent on innovation.
- 55% of organizations make tradeoffs between quality, security, and user experience to meet the need for rapid transformation.
- 88% of CIOs say the convergence of observability and security practiceswill be critical to building a DevSecOps culture, and 90% say increasing the use of AIOps will be key to scaling up these practices.

"It's difficult for teams to accelerate the pace of innovation while also maintaining the highest quality and security standards," said Bernd Greifeneder, Founder and Chief Technology Officer at Dynatrace.

"More frequent software deployments, combined with complex cloud-native architectures, make it easier for errors and vulnerabilities to escape into production where they impact customer experience and create risk. There simply aren't enough hours in the day for teams to test code as thoroughly as when they had only a single monthly deployment, but there's no margin for error in today's ultra-competitive, always-on economy. Something has to change."

Additional findings from the survey include:

- Organizations plan to increase their spending on automation across development, security, and operations by 35% by 2024, as they invest more in continuously testing software quality (54%) and security (49%) in production, automatic vulnerability detection and blocking (41%), and automating release validation (35%).
- 70% of CIOs say they need to improve their trust in the accuracy of AI's decisions before they can automate more of the CI/CD pipeline.
- 94% of CIOs say extending a DevSecOps culture to more teams is key to accelerating digital transformation and driving faster, more secure software releases.

Automation and modern delivery practices such as DevSecOps are key to this, but teams need to trust that their AI is reaching the right conclusions about the impact of a particular vulnerability

"Organizations know that manual approaches aren't scalable," continued Greifeneder. "Teams can't afford to waste time and effort chasing false positives, searching for vulnerabilities whenever a new threat alert appears, or conducting forensics to understand whether data has been compromised. They need to work together to drive faster, more secure innovation.

Automation and modern delivery practices such as DevSecOps are key to this, but teams need to trust that their AI is reaching the right conclusions about the impact of a particular vulnerability. To accomplish this, organizations require a unified platform that can converge observability and security data to eliminate the silos between teams. By bringing their data together and retaining its context, DevOps and security teams can unlock the insights they need through causal AI. This enables them to harness intelligent automation to rapidly deliver high-performing and secure applications that delight their users."

Technology investments have not improved collaboration at work

Nearly half of workers are using new technology for workplace collaboration, but only 1 in 3 have found it helpful.

RESEARCH from Howspace, the leading AI-powered collaboration platform, found that 3 in 4 businesses have made changes to adapt to new ways of working with nearly half of employees seeing access to new technology introduced with the aim of helping collaboration. However, of those with new technology, 64% cannot remember its name, and just under 1 in 3 found it helped improve collaborative work.

Despite almost half of businesses increasing their use of new technology, Howspace's research found it isn't helping people feel part of an organisation where they're heard. To help rectify this, employers need to renew their focus on their teams and their priorities. The research found that collaboration is critical to the success of an organisation and its culture. 76% of employees enjoy collaboration in the workplace. 45% believe they'll need to collaborate more to be good at their job in the next five years.

When breaking this down by the age of respondents, we found the strongest drive for collaboration was found in 30-34-year-olds, with 50% of respondents believing they'll need more collaboration to be successful, in comparison to 18% of 65-69-year-olds. Despite the high drive for collaboration, the research found only 46% of people believe the way their organisation collaborates will change in the next five years, and 28% believe their organisation should change the way it collaborates but won't. If employers wish to help their teams succeed, it's important they provide the right support to assist this. However, so far, we've seen that attempts are failing to enhance this and are instead confining people and prioritising control rather than collaboration.

In recent years, technology has been promoted as an answer to worker empowerment. Yet, according to employees, the technology introduced is geared more toward independent work. There is real scope for employers to engage with their teams and invest in technology that empowers them and encourages increased collaboration.

Ilkka Mäkitalo, CEO of Howspace, said: "We've been working in a document-centric world, but the icebergs are melting now that workers are starting to leave the workforce and assert their desire to work in a more human-centric environment. The future will be different as technology will shift from forming the structure of work to becoming a machine that works in the background and enables employees and organisations to reformulate and develop the best ways of working.

As a result, we're seeing a more immersive nature to work. By leveraging technology, we can make sense of large-scale conversations across locations, cultures, and languages and encourage synchronous and asynchronous work to take place seamlessly in a fluid environment. This new way of utilising technology will provide just enough structure for a more collaborative and adaptive workforce, which also helps organisations to empower and engage their employees and avoid them changing jobs."

Business leaders do no trust climate claims

Three quarters of business leaders do not believe their peers' ESG reporting, according to a new study, showing that a lack of industry trust and verifiable data is driving scepticism.

MOST BUSINESS LEADERS (76%) in major industries doubt their peers' Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting, according to a new study by Inmarsat.

The findings come from a new global, independent research report Accelerating sustainable action through IoTcommissioned by the company. It explores the views of over 1,000 senior technology and ESG decision-makers across agriculture, mining, transport, utilities and oil & gas firms. The survey asked professionals about their perceptions on ESG and whether they believed data provided by 'Internet of Things' (IoT) solutions could help improve reporting transparency. Respondents also report concerns about their peers' ESG priorities, with 80% saying their competitors are more focused on perception rather than achieving tangible sustainability outcomes.

However, despite scepticism about the motivations of their peers, most business leaders have faith in their own initiatives: with 81% convinced their company is more sustainable than their competitors.

Lack of data driving lack of trust
The results suggest that a lack of verifiable hard data – and the willingness to share it – is undermining trust and slowing progress on business sustainability. Positively, however, many believe data collected via IoT solutions is critical to building trust (81%) and improving ESG outcomes overall (82%).

Four in five respondents plan to increase their use of IoT solutions over the next 12 months to measure and understand the impact of their sustainability initiatives more accurately. A similar proportion reported they are already seeing return on investment from IoT tools used to improve sustainability (78%).

While the majority (83%) agree they could be doing more to effectively leverage IoT solutions to produce ESG data, engrained resistance to data sharing creates an additional barrier to progress. Only 47% said they would be comfortable sharing all their ESG data with third parties to improve industry reporting and benchmarking over the next 1-3 years, reinforcing that improving trust will be key to achieving better outcomes.

Satellite connectivity key for IOT
With big data at the heart of IoT effectiveness, nine in ten (91%) agree that satellite connectivity is the key to harnessing the full potential of IoT solutions focused on improving sustainability.

Currently, just over a third of respondents (36%) rely on satellite networks for IoT connectivity. However, satellite is set to become the most popular method of connectivity over the next decade, with half expecting to use it within this timeframe.

IoT-enabled data is not the only way satellite technology can help improve environmental outcomes. Inmarsat's recent 'Can Space Help Save the Planet?' report revealed that the world could reach Net Zero by 2040 – ten years ahead of schedule – by accelerating the adoption of space and satellite technologies.

Networks such as Inmarsat ELERA are central to this, providing ultra-reliable global connectivity which allows data sharing in industries like agriculture, electrical utilities, mining, oil and gas, and transport.

Jat Brainch, Chief Commercial and Product Officer, Inmarsat said: "You cannot manage what you cannot measure, so it is heartening to see so many organisations looking to IoT to assess and improve ESG reporting.

"To demonstrate progress, however, businesses must overcome their reluctance to share useful data and have the confidence to publish meaningful insights. Otherwise, they risk undermining genuine collaboration on sustainability and overshadowing the real progress being made.

There is no quick fix, but creating methodical benchmarks based on actionable data, and sharing the results, will play a critical role in re-establishing trustworthy ESG reporting.

"IoT is nothing without connectivity. Yet terrestrial coverage often cannot reach the remote locations where our most valuable data points frequently originate. By using satellites to close that connectivity gap, organisations can access data to make the right decisions right away. We need to make the most of that opportunity if we are to achieve Net Zero quickly."

David Hill, Executive Director, IoT Community, said: "Connected IoT solutions are the key to sourcing, analysing and sharing aggregate ESG data in a compliant and secure way. The same way we use wearable devices to measure our personal health, businesses should rely on IoT solutions more to monitor progress, reduce costs, improve safety and maximise sustainability. Robust data will back up their ESG claims and can be used for reporting across all areas of their operations, particularly in remote locations with challenging conditions.

"To achieve true success, we must shift our mindset with regards to data sharing and connectivity. Once businesses become comfortable sharing their ESG insights to improve broader industry reporting and benchmarking and prioritise satellite connectivity as a key enabler, will we start to see real progress on sustainability."

Digital investment continues

CXOs balance need for new investments in digital technologies to drive innovation and interoperability while addressing challenges with macroeconomics, IT resourcing and cost inflation.

RIMINI STREET has published the findings of the Censuswide Buyers Sentiment Survey, "IT Leaders: The Future Outlook Report 2023," examining CIOs' and CTOs' IT strategies, initiatives, challenges and focus. The Rimini Street-sponsored research polled more than 1,000 respondents across more than seven industries in the UK, Ireland, the Nordics and the Gulf states, and found IT leaders continuing to prioritize digital transformation and interoperability of technologies to achieve strategic, financial and operational business objectives in 2023. The report further showed that respondents had to balance their digital innovation investments against a variety of current challenges affecting their organization such as talent shortages, supply chain disruptions, macroeconomic cost inflation and geo-political realities, including complex global sanctions and de-globalization.

Key survey respondent findings

- 62% say digital transformation is a high priority in 2023, but among this group, 77% are only in the planning stage of projects and 56% currently do not have a digital transformation project;
- 76% of respondents have heard of composable ERP, and 84% of this group are expected to make investments in composable ERP in 2023;
- 47% feel the increased cost of living has led to the inability to meet salary expectations for new and existing staff;
- 67% want to reduce legacy enterprise application support costs by switching to third-party support. Digital Transformation for Composable ERP

A majority of IT leaders agree that a digital transformation project is in their near-term roadmap, however, there are mixed sentiments due to scarcity of budget, IT skills and labor. There is also a weighing of possible security and implementation risks associated with embarking on such projects, as noted by 43% of respondents. The number one driver towards making such investments in 2023 is to pivot towards becoming a much more flexible, scalable and agile organization, with a strong movement towards migration to the cloud to allow for composability and compatibility of their existing IT technology stack and enterprise application with new software applications that fit their unique business needs. Respondents strongly believe the adoption of composable ERP strategies should be considered a change management program requiring employee buy-in (47%), and that IT leaders should plan for additional talent and financial resources to support the new ecosystem of technologies (43%).

CXOs take action against low-value vendor support

While increases in IT budget for the new year remain conservative, 44% of IT leaders feel additional pressure by their board of directors to show increased return on investments for their technology spend. With a significant portion of IT budget allocated towards enterprise application software, CIOs and CTOs are reviewing the total cost of ownership associated with their purchase and maintenance of enterprise applications, especially the increased cost of hiring internal resources and additional contractors to close the gap when vendors fail to provide quality support.

Other respondent-noted pain points include:

- Being locked into an existing enterprise software contract (20%);
- Requirement of unnecessary upgrades to resolve issues (51%);
- Having to reproduce the issue to prove the root cause to the vendor before receiving support (40%).

A majority of IT leaders (67%) seek to reduce the total cost of ownership for existing, matured enterprise software by switching to third-party support programs, with almost half of participants (48%) looking to outsource support and maintenance services to free up their IT teams to work on more strategic, innovation-focused projects.

Talent and skills shortage paves way for innovative hiring, retention and reskilling strategies

Across the globe, organizations are finding continued challenge in filling the talent and skills shortage while preventing the loss of key staff due to burnout (42%). The increased workload for those remaining signals loss of productivity as they become much more reactionary, "fighting fires" instead of working on projects to optimize and evolve their IT roadmap (46%). Surveyed respondents are embracing the new talent acquisition and retention environment by becoming more flexible in their hiring models, including the hiring of talent with less experience and fewer skills, but with a willingness to learn (60%). Other actions taken to fill the talent gap include cross-training of existing staff (39%), offering unique perks and benefits such as a 4-day workweek, and engaging third-party services to provide ongoing or project-based support, application management or outsourcing services (47%).

SMBs are taking cybersecurity more seriously

SMBs are investing in protection with network and cloud security topping the list.

DATTO, a Kaseya company, has released its 2022 State of Ransomware report, which surveyed nearly 3,000 IT professionals in small to medium-sized businesses across eight countries (the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore). The report shows that SMBs are aware of increasing cyber threats and allocating resources and investing in areas such as network and cloud security.

Key takeaways from this year's survey include:

- About a fifth of IT budget is dedicated to security and many are seeing increases in budgets. 47% of SMBs plan to invest in network security in the next year.
- Over 50% of SMBs have implemented AV and email/spam protection, with network and cloud security as the top areas planned for investment in the next year.
- 37% of respondents run IT security vulnerability assessments three or more times a year, with 62% running them at least twice a year.
- 69% of SMBs currently have cyber insurance and 34% of those without cyber insurance are highly likely to get it in the next year.
- 42% of SMBs with cyber insurance think it's extremely likely that a ransomware attack will happen in the next year, while only 16% of SMBs without cyber insurance think the same.

"We're seeing many businesses take more steps to protect themselves against threat actors," said Chris McKie, VP of Product Marketing for Security and Networking Solutions. "Whether they're investing in new security products or utilising multiple security frameworks, most SMBs realise the very real threat that ransomware poses for their business, and they're doing what they can to keep themselves safe." Only 3 in 10 of SMBs have a best-in-class recovery plan in place, with 52% of them claiming they have a standard recovery plan in place. MSPs can help their clients improve their disaster recovery plan by building out their security and backup offerings or requiring clients to have cyber insurance. Cyber insurance can offset the risks of potential breaches, something which became increasingly more important when many SMBs accelerated their digital transformation efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional insightful findings:

Rather be phishing. Compared to ransomware, respondents think phishing is more likely to occur in the next year. Many think this is the better alternative, as they believe its impact is lower than the impact of ransomware.

Getting insured. Organisations with cyber insurance are more actively engaged in their cybersecurity. They have more IT support, more cybersecurity frameworks (CSFs), and more security solutions. They're also more likely to have experienced a cyber security incident in the past.

The right frame of mind. CIS framework is the most used cybersecurity framework, with 34% of respondents utilising it. This is followed by CMMC (30%), COBIT (27%), and NIST (22%).

Cyber insurance can offset the risks of potential breaches, something which became increasingly more important when many SMBs accelerated their digital transformation efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic

Building to last

Accessibility: Why it's vital we build our digital estates like we do our physical ones, writes **PAUL ALEXANDER, HEAD OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AT XDESIGN**

WALK INTO any new-build home in the UK and it will be laden with features that were not present in a 1960s equivalent. From significant features like wheelchair-compatible door frames, right down to the minutiae of plug sockets being placed at the right height from the ground; every detail of our modern built environment is there by design, rather than accident.

Legislation relating to buildings and accessibility has been around for over 50 years. In fact, in the US it was initially enshrined within the Civil Rights Bill under details dealing with discrimination.
This for me is a wonderful example of treating accessibility as a social issue as opposed to a medical one. And so, the decades that followed saw organisations retrofitting for accessibility on a huge scale. Adding ramps to entrances, installing lifts/elevators to buildings, repositioning furniture and fittings, switching out door knobs for handles or later replacing them with automatic doors.
In the context of the digital landscape, I believe we're feted to continue the trend for retrofitting that occurred in the built environment. To avoid this we need a shift in attitudes to the issues surrounding accessibility and the way we approach and build digital products.

The move to retrofitting

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) were published back in 1994 and many companies have spent their time, effort and money since, retrofitting screen reader compatibility, analysing colour pallets and reviewing and revising user journeys. Surely evidence enough that we're already in the clutches of a retrofit mentality?
What's more, the parallels between our physical and digital environments are even more striking when you consider that the first building-specific legislation for accessibility was only applicable to Government-owned buildings. Fast forward to 2022 and the tangible legislation in place for the web is only enforceable on Government digital estates. It's apparent then, that history does indeed repeat itself.

A disposable culture

Retrofitting is fine but should only be undertaken if it's the only option to make something accessible. However, I believe we need to rethink our approach to building our digital environment so that it is less wasteful and costly.

Our current approach is probably symptomatic of the disposable age we live in (which by the way is no excuse). The longevity of products has become less important and people are less patient/invested in quality. Drawing the same comparison with the digital world, I believe we've treated our digital products and solutions with the same disregard. After all, they're not tangible entities, so, therefore, must not be worth as much. Furthermore, why would we invest time and money into a rounded solution when we could have something shiny immediately? Velocity trumps quality in this scenario and retrospectively it is sincerely disheartening.

But, what's the alternative?

A new approach: What we need to consider
Put simply, building digital products that are 'built to last'.

We need to take the time to really consider all the variables that could shape an individual's interaction with a digital product or service. For instance, we cannot focus purely on the medical model of disability but also look to the social model to identify exclusion and find solutions to mismatches. Cognitive load, economic/locational constraints, as well as ethical and cultural considerations are all just as important in our modern world too. As it stands there is very little to enforce accessibility standards in terms of legislation. The Accessibility Discrimination Act and the Equalities Act in the UK deal with discrimination and ultimately that is tantamount to accessibility. By disregarding/neglecting people with capability mismatches, we are discriminating against the people who will most benefit from digital solutions whilst opening ourselves up to accusations of discrimination, reputational damage, and to be rather vulgar, financial implications.

Developing web solutions like buildings?

So, what if we started looking at web solutions like buildings?
As tradesmen and building firms are subject to scrutiny over the width of door frames, the positioning of utilities and rights of access, so too should the tech community be scrutinised for the accessibility they build into their digital products and services. We should be taking more responsibility for the things we build, and work to standards (whether legally binding or not) to ensure that our products are robust and usable, creating digital entities we can be proud of.

This is something we've fostered at xDesign through our Accessibility Council, which meets regularly to discuss how we can better bake accessibility and inclusive design into digital products right from the beginning of a project. We often start by understanding a particular user experience and then work to make our thinking come to life via our products and technology. We believe that good product design fixes a problem, however, great product design fixes for one, and also extends to many.

Building a digital legacy

Any person who has a parent that works in a traditional trade will have had the unenviable experience of being subjected to 'I worked on that house' or 'I dug the foundations for that office block'. However, while it can be tiresome to hear, why should we not have the same pride in our work? Build things to last that people will use for the long term, rather than providing quick-fix solutions that will ultimately have no longevity.

Ask yourself the question: Would I be proud to show my family my work? Let's make sure the answer is a resounding 'yes'.

Cloud first to Cloud smart: a strategic shift

A cloud smart approach can lead organisations to a place where their costs are predictable and their workloads are optimised.

BY RAJESH AWASTHI, VICE PRESIDENT & GLOBAL HEAD OF MANAGED HOSTING AND CLOUD, TATA COMMUNICATIONS

THE TERM 'digital transformation' has evolved for businesses, particularly in the last decade. What once meant a simple shift to virtual forms and online communication, now has vast implications across the different aspects of a business. As a core enabler of digital transformation, cloud adoption has been a focus for businesses in recent years, so much so that it's created the popular moniker 'cloud first.' Cloud adoption boomed rapidly, as businesses raced to leverage the cloud and support their hybrid work environments. Many businesses realised while they understand the need for cloud technology, they might not have the correct resources to ensure that they are harnessing its benefits strategically. This resulted in organisations having complex and fragmented implementations across various cloud platforms, whether it's public, private or edge. What has become clear, there is a difference between being cloud first and being cloud smart. In this article, we'll explore best practices for employing a cloud smart approach.

The price of failing to optimise an enterprise cloud strategy comes in the form of spiraling monthly costs, unmodified workloads failing to unlock critical cloud features and issues with performance management.

All in all, it takes away time and money that a cloud smart strategy should be giving back. Organisations must begin to leverage smart and sustainable approaches to their cloud infrastructure, including public, private or edge cloud. A customised cloud smart strategy can match an organisation's goals and circumstances to its ability to execute with the cloud.

Shortcomings of a Cloud First approach

For nearly a decade, cloud first has been the prevalent approach to cloud adoption initiatives. It can be counterproductive to maximise the cloud footprint by prioritising legacy system modernisation, resulting in workload migrations.

Some of the main shortcomings of a cloud first approach plaguing organisations are:

- **Gaps between cloud expectation and execution abilities:**
  Organisations often develop unrealistic expectations from the cloud that get compounded due to the lack of technical, financial, or strategic skills required to implement them.

- **Incongruency due to siloed business processes:**
  The cloud is agile and dynamic by nature. Legacy organisational properties like operational silos, rigid IT governance and outdated foundational practices are often incompatible with the cloud.

- **Speed over planning:**
  A cloud first approach is speed centric. The mad rush to incorporate the cloud and its elements across each stratum of operations leaves limited time to adopt other approaches.

- **Getting the right cloud services with the right workload:**
  Cloud offerings can be diverse, extensive and complex. The varied and complicated nature of cloud service provider offerings exacerbates the confusion in matching the right cloud services with the right workload.

- **Lack of specialized IT skills:**
  Other than investment, planning and a cultural shift, a cloud transformation, also requires a specialized IT skillset that organisations often lack.

All these issues can be reversed with a cloud smart approach where cloud adoption is synchronized with organizational goals and values.

Becoming Cloud Smart

Gartner estimates that 60% of organisations that have adopted a cloud first approach will switch to a cloud smart approach by 2023. Considering most business leaders are expected to spend half of their IT budget on the cloud by 2025, gaining control over these costs has now become of paramount importance.

A cloud smart approach entails determining whether an organisation has the right mix of private and public cloud, edge, and on-prem infrastructure to meet its various unique workloads, as well as all its compliance and regulatory obligations. To achieve this, a cloud smart approach considers a range of factors: the management, cost, visibility, interoperability, network, and application priorities of a business to create a more unified cloud environment.

Here are a few crucial considerations to derive maximum value from cloud investments with a holistic strategy:

- **Identify and set realistic goals:**
  The priority toward driving a cloud smart approach is to set realistic goals and expectations for cloud initiatives.

A cloud smart approach entails determining whether an organisation has the right mix of private and public cloud, edge, and on-prem infrastructure to meet its various unique workloads, as well as all its compliance and regulatory obligations

- **The right fitment for the migration-mix:**
  Identify the right cloud environments to determine which applications to keep on-premises and which to migrate to the cloud (private/public).

- **A performance measurement cycle:**
  Identify all the benchmarks and then focus on improving them as you progress along with a cloud smart strategy.

- **The right investment in services and orchestration tools:**
  Invest in tools and services that help in reducing the complexity of your cloud journey.

- **Mitigation of the risks and compliance violations:**
  Ungoverned cloud adoption and poor foundational practices can put organizations at risk of security breaches, data loss, compliance issues and budget overruns. They must be contained and mitigated accordingly.

- **Workplace culture realignment:**
  Use your current resources to their maximum value including reskilling and retraining staff. Also, enhance security postures and use best practices to inherit cultural reforms.

- **A cloud exit strategy:**
  Create a clear cloud exit strategy during the initial cloud design and planning phases considering aspects such as stakeholder management, application, legal and data governance, etc.

By taking on the benefits of all the different cloud environments and using that mix to offset the potential weaknesses of each, organisations can create a unified, automated and scalable environment perfect to their needs.

Collaboration is the key

It is a smart choice to look to a partner with experience to foster a holistic cloud experience. Organisations can choose to partner with experienced cloud migration experts and managed service providers to unlock significant business value from their cloud investments. The experts can weave their disparate IT infrastructure together, orchestrate migration / consolidation of different clouds (public, private and/or edge cloud) to provide a unified cloud environment that is optimised, continuously monitored and managed.

A savvy roadmap toward cloud optimisation includes:

- Formulating a well-defined strategy that identifies obstacles, ensures minimal disruption, and sets realistic goals and expectations.
- Improving performance and cost-saving through a well-crafted migration strategy.
- Championing workload migrations in sync with organisational preferences, its technological, security and regulatory environments.
- Enabling organisations to take advantage of cloud economics by protecting current investments, optimising infrastructure resources, and budget efficiently along with cost visibility.

In conclusion, a cloud smart approach can lead organisations to a place where their costs are predictable and their workloads are optimised. This gives them a competitive edge to execute a sustainable digital transformation strategy that is aligned with the customer's needs and organisational goals. After all, the cloud cannot deliver on its promise if you don't know what to expect from it.

2023 cybersecurity trends: Time for consolidation

From reassessing cybersecurity measures which were put in place during the pandemic and understanding how to recover from a cyberattack, to revised legislation, Distology highlights the biggest trends which will impact the cybersecurity space in 2023.

BY LANCE WILLIAMS, CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER AT DISTOLOGY

RECENT RESEARCH from the specialist IT cybersecurity distributor found that more than a third (36%) of IT leaders believe that attacks becoming more sophisticated and targeted in nature will be the biggest disrupter of the cybersecurity sphere over the next five years. For this reason, experts at Distology are predicting 2023 will be a year of consolidating cybersecurity solutions to ensure organisations are protected.

Some of the top trends in 2023, according to Distology, include:

Reassessing cybersecurity solutions post-pandemic:
Email security, cloud security, API, XDR and even backup and recovery solutions all need to be reassessed now that hybrid working is here to stay and the cyber threats are more dynamic now. Setting up simple rule-based security protocols isn't enough to keep up with the threats of today, let alone the future. The winning formula builds on traditional defences with artificial intelligence, human intelligence (SOC based analysts), and user communities all combining together to create organisation-specific context.

Preparing to recover will be key:
Over the last three years, the way people work, shop and spend has changed considerably so, if it hasn't been done already, organisations should be putting time in to explore disaster recovery, business continuity and cyber incident response policies and procedures. Aside from documentation, IT leaders should also be considering the support they have lined up for cyber incident response. Solutions such as Check Point or WithSecure help put out fires and can even go as far as helping organisations to get back up and running after an attack. After any form

of cyberattack, recovering systems is crucial, so organisations should also consider having a backup and recovery solution (and even better, a backup and recovery service, like Harbor Solutions) in place, otherwise IT leaders are on their own when it comes to recovering systems.

Quality over quantity:
Although it's clear IT leaders will have to shift their focus in 2023, this doesn't necessarily mean spending more on cybersecurity solutions. Instead, they need to ensure they have enough of the right technology and services in place to help protect the business and help it recover should the worst occur. Organisations considering making changes to their cybersecurity strategy need to have identity and access management at the top of their agenda, as everything flows from here.

Reviewing email security platforms is also important as phishing is getting more sophisticated by the day, ransomware attacks are costing hundreds of thousands and dark web cybercrime-as-a-service are increasingly easy and cost effective to subscribe to ("Splunk Data Security Predictions 2023).

For this reason, organisations should be ensuring that their cybersecurity platform investments incorporate artificial intelligence and human intelligence as much as possible, as this will deliver more holistic protection and assistance should an attack or breach occur. Lastly, IT organisations should also ensure their business leaders are prepared on all fronts – business risk management now firmly sits in the digital domain as much as the physical. This means knowing what solutions are in place, what part they play in a business continuity plan, how well-trained people are and how well planned the organisation's response to incident and recovery is.

Increased legislation:
As the world gets used to the new ways of working, legislation is having to adapt. The UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has already revised its Cyber Essentials+ programme and the EU has also released some guidance around cyber recovery, which will help inform and prepare organisations should they need to recover from an attack. Over the next 12 months, the industry will start to see these legislations and restrictions trickle down in to their organisation, while IT leaders will face more pressure when it comes to supply chain cybersecurity management and assurances – this is where, in the UK, Cyber Essentials+ will really help. Many organisations will need ISO27001 compliance, or at least alignment, and, if operating within or with US companies, SOC2 is a must. New, SME-centric, innovative security compliance automation platforms, like Drata, will help organisations ensure they're compliant with updated legislations on an ongoing basis. These platforms also offer a high level of efficiency.

"As we enter the new year, there will be a need across the board for general revisions to cybersecurity strategies and policies to ensure organisations are protected and prepared in 2023".

"Ultimately there will be new cybersecurity threats appearing in 2023 which IT leaders need to be prepared for. However, the biggest threat will always be the well-meaning insider – whether it's something silly they do, or they're compromised by a threat actor, the focus is to breach organisations via their people. With cyber resilience high on the agenda, the second level of threat is top-down organisational readiness. To achieve this, cybersecurity needs to form part of all organisational culture in the same way that physical security has for decades".

"For this reason, it's positive to see that legislation, guidance and training is changing to align with the ever-evolving threat landscape. When it comes to legislations, there are some which are in place which we've grown used to, such as ISO27001 and UK-GDPR, and these give organisations clear guidance on what they need to do to protect themselves, their people, their customers and their data from breaches, so the upgrades to legislation will only bolster this understanding,"

Channel Outlook for 2023 and beyond

Making the most of whatever uncertainty the future holds.

BY FRÉDÉRIC LECLERC, EMEA IT CHANNEL LEADER, EATON

IT'S FAIR TO SAY that the last couple of years have been hugely disruptive for businesses everywhere. From COVID-19 to geopolitical unrest, and from rising prices to an energy shortage, we face a series of unprecedented challenges. Here, we'll look at what all of this means for channel partners and their customers over the coming 12 months and beyond.

1. Support in uncertain times

The channel has been experiencing supply chain issues since the global health crisis began in 2020, the impact of which is still being felt today. In China, for instance, whenever there's an outbreak of COVID-19, everything in the area shuts down, leading to delays for some component manufacturers - particularly with regard to the semiconductors and base metals vital to the production of chips.
And this has a knock-on effect. Even the big players are seeing eight- to 10-month delays in delivering products. This can be challenging for channel partners, of course, whose customers are expecting these goods. It means they're unable to install products and provide the services their customers expect.

On top of this, rising energy prices have added yet another cost to businesses, leading many companies to pause investment. Increasing prices have created lower demand for some products, too,

meaning many channel partners will have a high level of stock, which no one is buying.

These supply chain issues are a significant challenge for everyone and, given that the current geopolitical crisis is disrupting supply routes across Europe, they're likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

One of the effects of these supply chain issues is that it's becoming harder for channel partners to forecast with any accuracy. Customer projects typically require multiple components. But if one of those components is missing, the whole project must be put on hold. Without knowing when that component is likely to be delivered, it's difficult to advise the customer on how long it will be before they can expect their project to be completed. Channel partners look to their vendors for support in times like this. Vendors should provide partners the support they need (through solutions, configurations, training etc.) while also allowing them to focus more of their time on supporting the needs of their own customers in these uncertain times.

2. Digital transformation through remote monitoring

Digital transformation is vital to all aspects of business today. Take sustainability, for example. As environmental concerns continue to grow, most organisations want to cut down on travel, to reduce their carbon footprint. Indeed, Eaton has already taken steps in this direction with regard to the provision of backup power, aiming to manage devices from our service centres rather than travelling to sites. To this end, we provide software solutions which enable customers to remotely manage and monitor their assets – how many UPSs they have, how old they are, the quality of their batteries. Using predictive maintenance, we can understand when a UPS will reach the end of its lifetime.

Our remote monitoring solution will also help customers cope with the growing risk of power outages caused by the energy crisis. Effectively, it's a simple way of alerting an organisation when an issue is about to occur, enabling them to manage their power generation and storage systems to avoid any potential downtime.

Despite its benefits, however, remote monitoring also represents a new cybersecurity threat. The more connected an organisation is, the greater the opportunity for hackers to access its network. That's why we invest heavily in cybersecurity services, to support our partners and their customers.

3: Opportunities in sustainability

Sustainability will be an increasingly important focus in the years ahead. To meet their ESG goals, many companies, including Eaton, will have targets in place to reduce their carbon footprint.

There's growing investment in renewable energy sources, too, for more sustainable, accessible and cost-effective power – especially in light of rising energy prices. Fortunately, there is already a wealth of government support and funds available to encourage sustainability initiatives, and we can expect to see a growing number of regulations being introduced to further help companies with these.

All of this represents significant opportunities for channel partners. UPS, energy storage, assets such as solar panels and EV chargers will have to be managed by IT. By understanding this area of the business, partners can play an important role in supporting their customers' sustainability efforts, providing them with the expert guidance and products such as long-life lithium-ion UPS, storage systems, and remote management services needed to better enable this.

We live in challenging times. While some issues look as though they're likely to remain for some time, it's possible that, by working , vendors like Eaton, their channel partners, and their customers can ride the storm and make the most of whatever uncertainty the future holds.

Our remote monitoring solution will also help customers cope with the growing risk of power outages caused by the energy crisis. Effectively, it's a simple way of alerting an organisation when an issue is about to occur

Managing risk, business planning offering and green positioning key for channel to unlock growth in 2023

As the channel looks ahead to 2023, here are the three areas **PAUL FLANNERY, VP OF INTERNATIONAL CHANNEL SALES AT EPICOR** believes resellers, VARs, integrators, MSPs and consultants should focus on to continue to grow.

THE CURRENT economic climate means that appetite for risk is extremely low. Despite this, businesses know they need to continue to innovate and digitise if they are to survive, and this involves staying at the forefront of technology. In fact, 95% of businesses we spoke to told us that right-fit technology will accelerate growth for their business.[1]

The role of channel businesses is to position themselves as consultants, as buyers look for experts to provide validation and confirmation, which de-risks their technology purchases.

For business technology purchases that will become the core of a business such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Manufacturing Execution Systems (MES), Warehouse Management Systems (WMS) and equivalent software services, buyers want to speak to an expert to understand what digital transformation actually looks like in their industry, including best practice, process, and what success looks like.

Buyers are also likely to want strong project management alongside implementation support, to ensure that the customer isn't left with an expensive piece of complex technology that they must figure out for themselves.

While the rise of self-service options such as e-procurement means some customers are bypassing the channel and even vendor salespeople when making technology purchases, this is not a trend we expect to significantly impact the channel's opportunity for growth, particularly in more complex sectors, such as aerospace, automotive and manufacturing.

Predictable business planning tools with interoperability

Business planning technology solutions have never been more vital. Channel partners that can offer solutions that include forward planning, financial planning and simulations that give buyers the data to make the right decisions in a volatile environment should be well placed in the next 12 months.

Customers need one source of truth for all their data points, with a digital core that runs through their businesses. Other apps which monitor disparate parts of the businesses should be able to integrate with this digital core, so interoperability of all software solutions will be a key selling point.

For example, if unpredictable energy prices, stock costings or the wage bill data is in silos, any financial and business planning tools will be of limited use this winter.
Although there is a lot of hype about the potential of predictive analytics, machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI), these solutions can't offer full value to customers if that one source of truth isn't already in place.

Getting green positioning right

In our hyperconnected business environment, many people realise that the only way whole industries are going to significantly reduce emissions is by managing the sustainability of their connected supply and value chains. Otherwise, it's too easy to claim one company is 'green' without acknowledging that the companies its buys from aren't.

However, due to rising interest rates, energy costs, and many other factors, survival over the next 6 months and beyond is the most pressing issue for most businesses. This is particularly true in the energy-intensive sectors we serve, such as automotive, construction, distribution, and manufacturing.

Channel partners and vendors need to strike the right balance in their own marketing and sales pitches to technology buyers; first and foremost the technology solutions they are recommending will help customers improve their businesses resilience and increase profit margins, and therefore justify the investment when spend is under increasing scrutiny.

However, new technology must help buyers achieve their business goals without rolling back any progress that's already been made on decarbonisation or emissions reduction, as the C-Suite needs to report to stakeholders (including investors, media and end consumers), that their operations and the vendors they work with are taking steps to become greener.

Today, pleading ignorance down your supply chain isn't good enough. This positioning challenge is where channel partners can provide trusted guidance on the right technology buying decisions, which will give the C-suite the confidence it needs to proceed.

REFERENCE

[1] Epicor surveyed 1,350 IT decision-makers in the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand, in the manufacturing, distribution, building supply, automotive and retail industries. The interviews were conducted in English from April 1 to 22, 2022 by PSB. The findings were released by Epicor in its annual Industry Insights Report.

What lies ahead for MSPs in 2023?

To succeed in a busy marketplace in 2023, MSPs will have to find ways to stand out and become savvy marketers.

BY CHRIS MCKIE, VP, PRODUCT MARKETING SECURITY AND NETWORKING, DATTO, A KASEYA COMPANY

THE PAST THREE YEARS have been a rollercoaster ride for managed service providers (MSPs). The pandemic brought a whole range of threats as well as new opportunities. At the beginning of the first COVID-19 wave, MSPs had to act fast to meet their clients' work-from-home needs when the first lockdown was announced; they then had to adapt their services again when people returned to their offices and hybrid working became the new normal. While the industry may be hoping to return to calmer waters in the coming year, Kaseya's latest Datto Global State of the MSP Report makes for insightful reading. The survey of 1,800 MSPs worldwide found that providers will have to keep developing fast in order to thrive – and the break-fix model is back, but with a twist.

Published at the end of October, the report shows that for the second year running, MSPs are worried about their competition. Almost one in three respondents ranked this as their top concern. Although the pandemic led to an overall upsurge in demand for IT services, it also meant new MSPs entered the scene. And in a largely saturated market, a quarter of MSPs say they find it hard to attract new customers as small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) shop around for the best deals. Some MSPs manage to get a foot in the door with larger companies by solving a problem for internal IT teams that are initially reluctant to work with new vendors. In this spin on the traditional break-fix model, they suggest a one-off project such as a compliance audit; the results then lead to a co-managed service agreement. This paves the way for MSPs to establish a relationship, and in the future, expand their service offering with the client.

More revenue from break-fix

This approach to new business is one of the reasons why revenue from break-fix has increased. According to the Kaseya report, over a third of revenues in the past 12 months came from break-fix or project-based work. Meanwhile, sustaining growth and profitability still prove to be major concerns for 28% of surveyed MSPs. One major

factor that contributes to the challenge of remaining competitive is that many MSPs struggle to find the time, tools and skills required to run successful marketing and lead generation campaigns.

But, without a solid brand, an MSP may only be competing on price. Some lean on their technology partners for marketing and sales enablement support, taking advantage of tools ranging from pre-built campaigns to social media services and joint events to boost their success rate.

The move to the cloud continues

In fact, there are huge opportunities ahead. The cloud is still an area for growth. The pandemic greatly accelerated cloud uptake. Now, as businesses navigate the downturn, they seek to take even more advantage of cost-saving cloud services. Roughly half of MSPs anticipate that at least three quarters of their clients' workloads will be in the cloud over the next three years, including email servers, databases and application servers. In line with this, MSPs are increasingly delivering cloud migration projects.

Many of the surveyed MSPs are also preparing to add new managed services in 2023, primarily around collaboration software (26%), storage design and implementation (25%) and business intelligence or analytics (23%).

Security remains a priority

In addition, there are plenty of growth opportunities in expanding security offerings. The top services currently delivered by MSPs are email security (76%), password policy management (71%), security framework and compliance auditing (69%) and two-factor authentication (67%). Nearly all MSPs offer some form of managed security service, and there is now a move toward solutions that do more than just help the recovery from cyber-attacks.

Increasingly, MSPs are looking toward tools that allow them to mitigate and minimise risks for their clients. Expected growth areas include dark web monitoring, threat detection and response, compliance monitoring and privileged access management. However, there are barriers to delivering these new security services, too. Four in ten MSPs find it difficult to hire skilled cybersecurity professionals, while over a third say they are having to manage too many different security products.

Trends for 2023

Overall, the MSP market appears to be strong and healthy. As many as 95% of survey respondents believe that 'now is a good time to be an MSP'. Three out of five stated that they have upped their revenue over the past year and 82% expect to grow further over the next three years.

However, to succeed in a busy marketplace in 2023, MSPs will have to find ways to stand out and become savvy marketers. MSPs have also reported challenges in hiring new talent, so given the number of technology and growth areas that they will have to juggle, improving operational efficiencies will be a key focus. Adopting the right tools will help them overcome any challenges and make the most of the opportunities ahead.

Seven key tech trends for 2023

2023 will be a year where the only thing we can all be certain about is uncertainty. And we can expect more than the world has seen in years.

BY ERIC HERZOG, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER AT INFINIDAT

MOVE OVER VUCA (volatile, unstable, challenging and ambiguous), we are entering a new, BANI era, with an economic environment that's brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible. Conditions today aren't just unstable; they are chaotic and completely unpredictable. Any ambiguity present has escalated and in many industry sectors, the landscape is completely incomprehensible.

This macro environment will create an IT landscape in which we are anticipating seven core tech trends to emerge in 2023, ranging from cybersecurity, hybrid cloud and consolidation, to resource utilisation, guaranteed SLAs and green IT. This article explores each one in turn, offering a glimpse into what's in store over the next 12 months.

#1: Cybersecurity will surge in 2023 in a new wave to safeguard enterprises

Cybersecurity is paramount across all areas of an enterprise IT infrastructure, including enterprise storage, servers, and networking applications. Cybersecurity continues to be a huge trend because many enterprises have not yet filled all their gaps on the security front and the pace of cyberattacks continues to increase exponentially. Global laws around cybersecurity are changing rapidly, so we will see the implications of tighter measures and more stringent reporting requirements in 2023. This trend is focused on what is being done to ensure security, addressing attack vectors perpetrated by criminals and other entities. Cybersecurity is not just about crime; it's an overarching vehicle for everything from crime to attacks. It's a critical factor across everything to do with data-driven enterprise infrastructure.

Security must be built into every enterprise storage platform to ensure true cyber storage resilience. This will enable enterprises, managed service providers, cloud hosting providers and managed hosting providers to safeguard against ransomware, malware and other cyberattacks. Storage solutions need the ability to deliver rapid recovery based on immutable snapshots of an enterprise's data, ensuring that data is intact and uncompromised. If this is in place, it will eliminate the need to pay the "ransom" and removes the power of cyber criminals to wreak havoc on organisations. Savvy customers should look for vendors offering guaranteed cyber storage resilience service level agreements (SLA) around both immutability and cyber recovery times.

#2: Hybrid cloud will attract more interest among enterprises than the public cloud alone

Hybrid cloud, which is the combination of on-premises private clouds and public clouds (off-premises), is expected to continue to grow in popularity in 2023. What has happened is many companies are realising that having highly transactional workloads which are fully migrated to the cloud require the ultimate in cyber security and this presents many issues. For example, either the applications do not get the SLAs from the public cloud providers they need in terms of availability, performance, security, or reliability, or it is much more expensive to go completely to the public cloud.

When a company is doing large numbers of transactions, the networking fees alone skyrocket when an enterprise tries to go fully to the public cloud – without having any on-prem private cloud. Due to serious concerns about cost, performance, security and availability, many companies have realised they cannot move everything to the public cloud. Certain workloads, such as highly transactional workloads, should remain on-prem in an enterprise's private cloud. The best practice that has emerged over the past few years – and is expected to continue in 2023 – is to determine workload by workload which is better, so enterprises need to have both on-prem private clouds and access to public clouds.

Look for vendors offering state-of-the-art on-prem solutions for both primary and secondary storage. Providers should also have in place partnerships with public cloud providers, such as AWS Outposts, to make the on-ramp from the private cloud to the public cloud seamless and smooth.

#3: An intense focus on IT costs will drive enterprises to make changes to their storage in 2023

Costs, costs, costs...in the data centre! Due to the tough global financial conditions, 2023 will see an even more intense focus on IT costs, particularly in enterprise infrastructure. The question for IT managers is: "Can I sweat the asset?" It's a matter of determining whether keeping the IT asset, such as a storage array or server or networking gear, longer would hurt the business or not. Can the organisation live with it longer to cut capital expenditures, no matter what the infrastructure is? In the storage world, you could sweat the assets if you want to, but it is usually a false economy. Instead, by consolidating multiple storage arrays – just as IT teams consolidate existing servers with more powerful servers – you can dramatically reduce CAPEX, OPEX, and IT operational resources in significant ways.

Through consolidating dozens of storage arrays into only a few advanced systems, cost conscious organisations can achieve a positive ROI and long-term savings. At the same time. storage capacity, retrieval speeds and cyber storage resilience can be improved. For even greater economy look for vendors offering flexible consumption models, including FLX (Storage-as-a-Service) and Elastic Pricing (Capacity on Demand), to manage costs most efficiently.

#4: Resource utilisation and hiring will focus on value-add IT work, delegating routine tasks to self-managing technologies

Enterprises will carefully, and cautiously, examine their IT resource utilization and hiring in 2023, asking questions such as: "Can I hire people to do the jobs? What jobs do they do? How do I get enough IT people to do their functions?" Hiring priorities will focus on IT jobs that add value through human intervention to improve business outcomes. This means storage needs to be easy to manage and deliver a set-it-and-forget-it experience. In 2023 and beyond, storage will need to take care of itself and any technology that enables this function will be critical. The implications of having self-managing storage with autonomous automation include: refocus L&D budgets onto higher-level tasks, increased cost-efficiency, reduced risk of mistakes, and more flexibility in hiring in a job market with high competition for IT talent.

By switching to software defined storage technologies and storage systems that leverage software storage defined capabilities that utilise autonomous automation, the systems can automatically learn as new applications and servers

are added. These intelligent platforms quickly learn about the applications and workloads and automatically configure to optimise performance, reliability, and availability for new applications. There is no need for performance tuning, which reduces the burden on companies to find more qualified professionals and train them. Instead, companies can focus their recruitment on other IT tasks requiring more specialised knowledge and ingenuity.

#5: Green IT will add a new dimension to data centres and reduce their environmental impact

The shift for data centres to go green is accelerating around the world. Data centres use enormous amounts of power and they require high levels of cooling, affecting the carbon footprint. The drive to reduce their environmental effects will expand significantly in 2023, especially as the explosive growth in data continues exponentially.

Technology systems, such as storage arrays, will need to be consolidated and expanded with larger capacity, yet with smaller footprints compared to legacy systems. IT managers will be proactively making moves to reduce energy usage, cooling, rack space, and floor space. It starts with consolidation and planning for a future of fewer storage arrays, which translates into less to recycle. Not only will it lower costs, but the environmental impact will be measurably better.

Organisations can make rapid progress in their attempts to go green in the data centre by consolidating storage arrays and purpose-built backup appliances (PBBA). Switching to large-capacity storage systems and PBBAs puts more data into smaller data centre footprints, freeing up rack space and floor space whilst reducing energy consumption. When companies use fewer storage arrays, they use less power and less cooling, resulting in both a green impact and substantial cost savings in CAPEX and OPEX, as well as a reduction in IT operational needs. In addition, having fewer storage systems translates into recycling fewer systems in the future, which is another benefit of a green initiative. It means recycling a lower amount of material and at a lower cost. In short, Green IT not only helps the global environment, but also reduces each customers' CAPEX, OPEX, and manpower needs. Green IT equals cost savings.

#6: Demand for excellent customer experience will disrupt legacy storage implementations

Enterprises and service providers/hosting providers will expect a higher level of pro-active customer experience in 2023, both in terms of service & support and technical user experience. IT buyers will want "easier, faster and better" as the defining attributes of enterprise technology solutions in the new year. Easier, faster, better translate into time savings and cost savings. What usually takes 2 hours, they now want in 10 minutes, which provides an improved customer experience. IT buyers also expect higher levels of service & support, obtaining answers immediately from qualified professionals, with a preference for a "white glove service."

Vendors need to be offering an outstanding level of service, with first-rate technical advisors, top-notch service and support, with solutions that are easy to deploy and that utilise autonomous automation. This means the storage platform can manage itself, getting smarter and better every minute of every day.

#7: Everything As a Service defines the new reality

There is no denying that "as a service" is of massive significance to IT leaders everywhere, with software-as-a-service, storage-as-a-service, networking-as-a-service to name just a few options. Importantly, this trend features flexible consumption models to provide ultimate adaptability – just what cash strapped enterprises will be looking for in 2023. The 'as-a-service' model offers the ability to pay as you go, for exactly what they need, with the flexibility to scale as and when required. In 2023, we can expect expanded adoption of 'as-a-service' offerings to make more enterprises much more adaptable and better able to manage costs and resources efficiently. This also includes storage-as-a-service, which promises to transform the way companies deploy and use storage in a world of escalating data usage.

2023 is shaping up to be a year of more uncertainty than the world has seen in years. To prepare for managing higher levels of risk, enterprises will collectively go to the next level of demanding guaranteed SLAs in IT infrastructure. Buyers should look for rock-solid guarantees on availability, cyber recovery and performance - and be prepared to walk away if vendors don't offer fully backed enterprise storage solutions.

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Third-Party Risk Management:
Why 2023 could be the perfect time to overhaul your TPRM program

The third-party risk management landscape is becoming more complex due to the rise in the number of external entities companies are working with.

BY ALEX KLINGER, PRE-SALES ENGINEER AT SURECLOUD

ENSURING RISK caused by third parties does not occur to your organization is becoming increasingly difficult. Every business outsources some aspects of its operations, and ensuring these external entities are a strength and not a weakness isn't always a straightforward process.

In the coming years we'll see organizations dedicate more time and resources to developing detailed standards and assessments for potential third-party vendors. Not only will this help to mitigate risk within their supply chain network, it will also provide better security.

As demand for third-party risk management (TPRM) grows, here we discuss some of the key reasons why we believe 2023 could be pivotal for the future of your organization's TPRM program.

Focus on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) risks

In recent years we've seen an increased corporate focus on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) risks, not only within their own organization but also associated with any third parties or extended enterprises.
As a result, ESG has become about more than avoiding risk. It's a strategic priority. Leadership teams understand the importance of working with third parties whose objectives align to their own business strategy. Consumers and regulators are increasingly aware of their environmental and social responsibilities, so much so, ESG has become a requirement for key stakeholders too, particularly investors that want to be associated with companies that prioritize their ESG posture.

For example, recent research from Gartner suggests that by 2024 75% of vendor risk management programs will be tracking the environmental, social and governance demands of their IT vendors to guide their decision making process. ESG is no longer a straightforward tick box exercise, there is much greater scrutiny of third-party practices as many businesses are incorporating ESG into their third-party risk management assessment.

Including ESG in your TPRM strategy is not only a way to protect your organization against regulatory action, fines and reputational damage, but should also be seen as a business opportunity. It can help increase your customer base, attract investment and enhance brand reputation. However, if it's not included, it can have serious repercussions.

For example, analysis of ESG performance on firm market value conducted by Moody Analytics demonstrated that ESG controversies led to a significant, negative and abnormal equity return in the short-term, over an annual period. It found that moderate to severe ESG events generate abnormal stock market losses of -1.3% to -7.5% over twelve months, which represents a loss of approximately $400 million for a typical-sized firm in the study. This effect can already be seen in 2023, as shares of Glencore, the mining company, fell after its main Shareholders recently filed a resolution calling for more clarity over how its plans for thermal coal production aligned with the Paris Objective agreement to limit global temperature increase to 1.5C.

The upside to an increased focus on ESG programs is it's pressuring organizations to rethink due diligence requirements

The Impact of Nth Parties

Organizations are becoming increasingly dependent on third parties and sub-contractors. A study by Gartner found that 60% of companies work with over 1,000 third parties, and they expect this number to increase as business becomes more complex. As a result, many organizations are beginning to recognize that the risks of connecting with these outside entities is far greater than they first thought.

The reason for this is that any third-party that a business chooses to work with will likely have hundreds, if not thousands, of its own sub-contractors. Meaning businesses become more dependent on fourth, fifth and Nth parties, all of which introduce risk into their business ecosystem.

For example, a business could rely on a manufacturer that experiences a transport failure or security vulnerability at a third-party cloud supplier, which presents a high-level of risk to their business, even though they are not directly connected. The issue of Nth parties was evidenced during the SolarWinds hack in 2020 where the hackers were not only able to access data and networks of their customers, but also the data and networks of the clients and partners of SolarWinds' customers. The magnitude of the problem with Nth parties could be greater than that of third parties, as the third-party business environment continues to increase.

The level of risk Nth parties present to organizations supply chain management is becoming more apparent.

Increased frequency and sophistication of cyber-attacks on third parties

Forrester predicted that 60% of security incidents in 2022 would stem from third parties. In 2021 there was a 300% increase in supply chain attacks, a trend that has continued to increase over the past 12 months also. For example, Japanese car manufacturer Toyota was forced to completely shut down its operations due to a security breach with a third-party plastics supplier.

It's not only the frequency of third-party attacks that has increased, but also the methods that cyber criminals are using are becoming increasingly sophisticated. For example, the SolarWinds cyber breach in 2020 was so advanced that Microsoft estimated it took over a thousand engineers to stop the impact of the attack.

As the sophistication and frequency of supply chain attacks increases, the impact they have on businesses reputations and valuations is also becoming apparent. There is a need for organizations to conduct thorough due diligence of the third parties they choose to work with, otherwise the consequences could be disastrous.

Cybersecurity should be a non-negotiable feature of all business transactions

Increase in use of external assistance for TPRM
As the scope, complexity and importance of third-party management continues to increase, the need for companies to leverage the use of external assistance with the TPRM process will only increase as well. However, many businesses don't have the capabilities required for TPRM, in terms of resources and technology. Some utilize in-house support and technologies as a cost-effective answer to the problem, though this can be restrictive as organizations need to be able to respond rapidly to an ever-changing and evolving regulatory environment.

The need for external help will be compounded further by the increasing remit TPRM teams need to cover, which includes a wider range of risks, such as ESG and nth parties, as well as to achieve a deeper understanding of how risk is managed by each third-party.

It's for these reasons that the use of external assistance, such as adopting technology enabled solutions and managed services, will only increase in the future. The Deloitte Global Third-Party Risk Management Survey 2022 supports this as 82% of companies surveyed anticipate greater demand for a comprehensive TPRM end-to-end service solution. Demand for a managed service and technological solution will become more popular than ever before. Organizations are increasingly looking for a tool that provides a comprehensive, end-to-end insight-driven service that runs the day-to-day operational activities of a TPRM department.

The third-party risk management landscape is becoming more complex due to the rise in the number of external entities companies are working with. This means it's now more important than ever for organizations to have a mature third-party risk management program in place.

Utilizing the expertise of an external TPRM managed services provider could be the first step to future proofing your business, as well as preventing a large amount of potential financial and reputational damage.

Why partnering with third-party expertise should be a top priority in 2023

There are undoubtedly going to be challenges in 2023, but if the channel adapts and innovates to address the ever evolving opportunities that their clients have then there is no reason to be pessimistic.

BY PETER OLIVE, CEO, VORTEX 6

TODAY WE LIVE in a volatile and unpredictable world with cost of living and inflationary challenges, supply chain disruption, geo-political issues, and skills shortages. The traditional ways of doing business are changing at pace, as are technology requirements, and this is only set to keep on accelerating. The channel, like most businesses, is seeing new ways of working with new technologies: the cloud, software as a service (SaaS), and annuity models which have changed the way we think and run our businesses.

Why value delivered is more important than it's ever been

The increased uncertainty in the market sets the scene for 2023 but wherever there is change there is opportunity; the value delivered to the customer is more important than it has ever been. Those operating in the channel should always be looking to add value, driven by the importance of services over a product's lifecycle. Transforming how an organisation does business, to produce better business intelligence, gives them the data they need to be able to add extra value to their clients. Competition will increase in 2023, but if we show where we can deliver strong ROI, the conversation becomes less around price and more about value.

The significant opportunities around annuity business, automation, digitizing the business, migrating to the cloud, API integration, sharing of data, and possibly most importantly around business intelligence and data analytics, present the largest openings. The channel is having to manage revised vendor partner programs centred more on software annuity income. Different vendors have their own approach to managing a product lifecycle, yet the channel must satisfy all of them whilst running their own methods.

Annuity businesses are highly profitable

We may feel forced into having to change but managing your customers' solutions lifecycle is great business practice. Annuity businesses are highly profitable, but crucially only if you can retain and expand clients while adding new ones. There is nothing new here, except today's customers are looking more at value and flexibility where they can switch services on and off. The need to manage this through a lifecycle practice is critical. Partners that don't address this challenge and are slow to move to this new approach run the risk of being overwhelmed by larger competitors.

It can be confusing, and the channel will need to embrace digital business models in a coherent, robust, integrated, nimble, fast, secure, and automated way. The channel will also need to continue to deal with multiple vendor programs, different portals, reduced availability of market

expertise in partner programs and retention of expertise, all of which can be an inhibitor to taking advantage of the financial opportunities offered by the vendor partner programs through discounts, rebates and incentives. The partners that can address this, understanding the right products and services for the market and the true profitability of deals, will be the winners. Identifying not only the margin on the Bill of Materials but also the incentives, rebates and margin from attached services will help partners understand their true profitability.

Tracking and understanding certifications

My final challenge, looking at the year ahead is around people. Knowing what skills you have will help you drive and deliver your business strategy. There are around 500 vendors working with the UK channel with a combined total of 8,000 certifications. Tracking and understanding what certifications you have will be a key driver in 2023.

All this combined with understanding your customer's business, knowing where they want to improve, and being able to help them get there will deliver success in a challenging environment. Likewise, channel partners often don't have the time and expertise to really drill down into the vendor programs. Senior management often don't understand the scale of rewards they can get from the incentive programs and what return they get from investing in new processes and practices. Therefore, it is far more cost effective to work with a third party who has real knowledge and expertise that the channel partner will never be able to match.

Working with a strategic partner to unlock value

Here at Vortex 6, the team is working on unlocking value from vendor incentive programs every minute of the day. This is a real challenge for partners as the programs move and evolve so quickly and as incentives and rebates move away from hardware sales, reducing income for those who won't adapt.

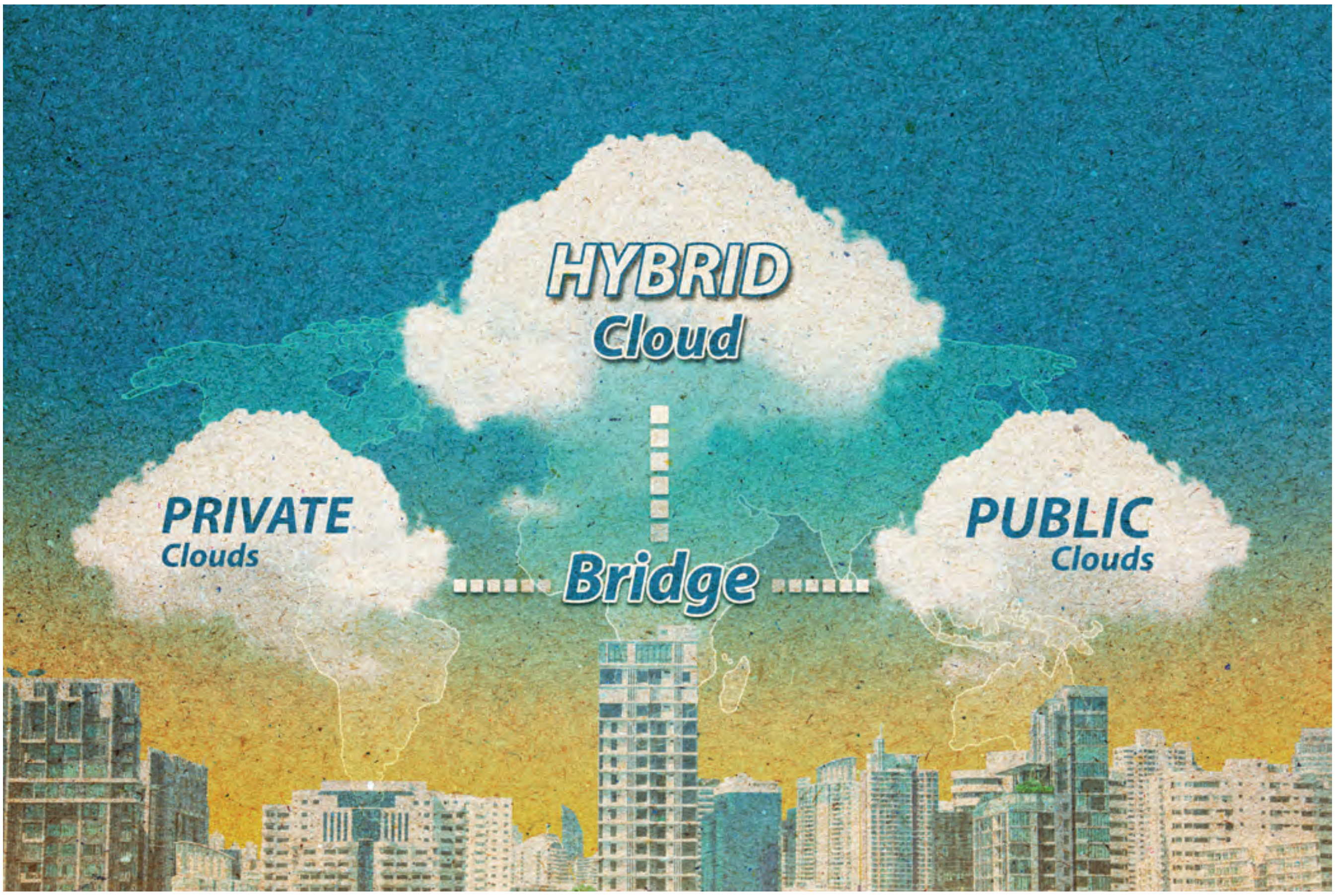
Equally, partners find it hard to tally both the upfront and ongoing investment with how profitable the program is likely to be for them. But they must, because partners who don't understand the full profitability of a deal will fall behind.

Put simply, expertise in these programs is in short supply. They are far more complex than they were previously, and we often find that even if a partner employs someone to do the work, they are inevitably poached when they reach a certain level of expertise, so partners need to find a way of maintaining continuity. This is where working with third-party organizations who have this expertise and can deliver that strategic value from incentive programs is going to become more important than ever.

A year of opportunity

The media love to focus on the negatives and like nothing better than reporting recessions. The UK's economy is predicted to shrink by 0.4% next year. Yet that means 99.6% of the world's 6th largest economy will still be functioning. In October, the economy grew by 0.3% against all forecasts; gloomy predictions rarely eventuate to the level expected.

There are undoubtedly going to be challenges in 2023, but if the channel adapts and innovates to address the ever evolving opportunities that their clients have then there is no reason to be pessimistic. Revenues and profits can continue to grow if you adapt, remain relevant and partner with expertise that will help you get to where you're going faster.



Four cloud trends that may surprise you

Right now, only 8% of companies rely on a single cloud provider; we can certainly expect businesses to further diversify and leverage the range of public cloud, on-premises and private cloud solutions that work best for their individual business needs, both in 2023 and beyond.

BY JAKE MADDERS, CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF HYVE MANAGED HOSTING

GLOBALLY, the cloud computing market is expected to surpass $1 trillion by 2028. Although this may sound like a big number, this figure is not shocking for those in the know. If leveraged in the right way, the cloud can offer companies a flexible, cost-effective and scalable solution against alternatives such as on-premise infrastructure – so this growth trend comes as no surprise.

It has been suggested that the cloud can reduce a company's total cost of ownership by as much as 40% which helps to explain why 90% of organisations have already adopted some form of the cloud into their infrastructure in 2022.

When we reflect on the progress made in 2022, we can see that 39% companies were already running at least half their digital workloads in the cloud and we can expect this number to increase in 2023 to at least 50%.

In an age of hybrid working, the cloud is quickly redefining the way businesses operate and how employees work. So, besides a forecasted uptick in adoption, what other cloud trends can we expect to see next year?

Greater demand from SMEs

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are diversifying their cloud approach by investing in managed cloud services.

A managed cloud can offer benefits such as disaster recovery, centralised control, and reliable infrastructure. With a managed cloud, the software runs on a server that serves a single client organisation. The third-party manages the server, ensuring that the client receives optimal performance and uptime.

For SMEs looking ahead at how they can further optimise their digital transformation this year, the use of outsourced managed cloud services is envisioned to become an increasingly routine practice. Indeed, in 2023, SMEs are expected to spend half of their technology budgets on cloud services. For these smaller companies, the appeal of a managed cloud lies in the security, customer support and disaster recovery that can be offered by third-party cloud partners. By entrusting their cloud applications and infrastructure to experts, they can focus more time and energy on achieving their core business goals and operations.

Data Sovereignty

Data sovereignty refers to the rules and regulations of data which are subject to change depending on the country in which the data resides. It therefore becomes more complicated to keep control over data if it's stored in more than one country as you must adhere to differing data regulations. So while cloud computing might have become a commonplace technology, there is no common global regulation, making it difficult to retain control over all of a company's data globally. This also means a traditional "one-size-fits-all" approach to data storage is no longer suitable - if it ever was in the first place.

What does this mean? More businesses move towards agile data storage solutions that might leverage a combination of different types of cloud storage, and opt for the blend that makes it easiest to manage changing requirements while retaining control over data. They might even opt for a managed hosting provider which can take care of data regulations on their behalf and relieve that burden.

Hyper Converged Infrastructure

Hyper Converged Infrastructure (HCI) combines commodity data centre server hardware with locally attached storage devices and essentially eliminates the difficulties associated with legacy infrastructure. Many HCI vendors are beginning to offer capabilities in the cloud. HCI supports the cloud by providing a simple and productive environment to set up databases on the cloud, and does so in a structured, scalable and cost-effective way. This way, customers can take advantage of cloud resources and services while still maintaining a high level of control of their IT infrastructure.

Cloud Repatriation

Cloud repatriation and the rise of hybrid cloud is a surprising one given the known benefits of cloud migration. Cloud repatriation is the opposite of cloud migration, it is the shift away from the public cloud and back to on-premises infrastructure or to a private or hybrid cloud. It was reported that 80% of organisations shifted some public cloud data to local infrastructure (be it private cloud, hybrid cloud or an onsite data centre). Organisations are increasingly utilising a hybrid cloud approach in order to reap maximum benefits, including better security, and placing workloads in the right location.

2023 and beyond

These four individual trends highlight what we already know: that the cloud is still paving the way forward for managing data, workloads and applications due to the many business benefits that can be derived, such as scalability, cost efficiency and remote access. What is interesting about these specific trends is that they dive deeper into the types of cloud that will flourish in the years to come. Gone are the days where the standard public cloud and big cloud providers are the go-to solution – companies are becoming more educated of the many other options available to them, particularly options that manage complex data challenges such as data sovereignty while still offering total control over data, such as managed cloud providers. This is especially helpful for SMEs which lack the resources and experience to manage such complex infrastructure.

Right now, only 8% of companies rely on a single cloud provider; we can certainly expect businesses to further diversify and leverage the range of public cloud, on-premises and private cloud solutions that work best for their individual business needs, both in 2023 and beyond.

Data sovereignty refers to the rules and regulations of data which are subject to change depending on the country in which the data resides. It therefore becomes more complicated to keep control over data if it's stored in more than one country as you must adhere to differing data regulations

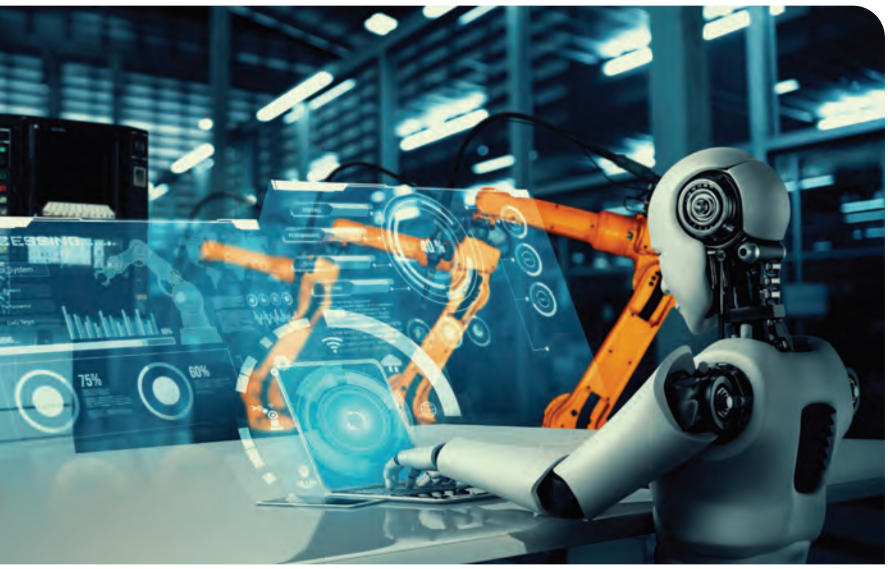
Why 2023 is the year of opportunity for MSPs

Even though organisations are tightening their purse strings and an increasing number of MSPs are being acquired by technology companies, the future for MSPs looks promising and profitable.

BY GREG JONES, VICE PRESIDENT OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, EMEA, AT DATTO, A KASEYA COMPANY

WITH 2022 firmly in the rear-view mirror and 2023 beginning to unfold, organisations are focused on implementing plans for the coming year – whether it's automation, digital transformation, or improving the hybrid work environment. While business plans may change from year-to-year, some things never change. One of those is the cyberattack landscape. What does all this mean for managed service providers (MSPs) and their future?

Uncertain economic conditions will more than likely continue in 2023, leaving organisations in the unenviable position of overcoming the market climate by reducing spend and delaying investments in new solutions. At first glance, it looks like a dismal outlook for MSPs, however the economic downturn can be an opportunity for them to grow.



Intelligent automation promotes profitability

Ongoing staffing issues are forcing businesses to do more with less while, simultaneously, tight budgets have made it necessary to decrease operational costs. MSPs and their clients can ride this economic wave by incorporating intelligent automation into existing processes, which will ultimately help them be more efficient, productive, and profitable. For example, processes that are easily automated include labour-intensive and repetitive tasks such as reconciling expenses, diary management, documentation, and other administrative tasks.

Across nearly every area of a business, opportunities can be found. To determine the processes – especially the outdated ones that can be improved – businesses should have an open discussion with their MSP partner. MSPs, on the other hand, can automate many basic day-to-day tasks such as onboarding new clients, dealing with recurring Remote Monitoring Management (RMM) tickets and much more.

Digital transformation drives end user improvements
Both MSPs and their clients will continue their digital transformation efforts, however the focus will be on improving the hybrid/remote workers' day-to-day experience. While monetary investments will be necessary, organisations will be able to keep costs to a minimum by incorporating tools such as video call platforms. This effort is less about cutting-edge technologies and more about harnessing technology to drive the business forward. Additionally, consolidated platforms will simplify how emails and messages are processed and how users access services and content.

In 2023, digital transformation efforts will revolve around the user experience by considering how they can make each employee's working day easier, shave time off jobs, and free up time for other tasks. While MSPs will continue their own digital transformation efforts, forward-looking companies will require their services to successfully implement their digital transformation plans.

Remote working tools go from basic to sophisticated

At the start of the pandemic, there was a sudden surge in remote working as the world went into lockdown. Three years on, many organisations have carried on hybrid working. In the early days, workers were only provided the necessary basics to get the job done such as a laptop/desktop, webcam and VPN connection. The next 12 months will be a good opportunity for businesses to take the next step in transforming from basic work-from-home tools to more sophisticated technology. Improvements to consider range from tools for better time management and improved security to new marketing and communications platforms, and even accounting system upgrades.

Improving cybersecurity requires more outsourcing

Fuelled by ransomware, cybercrime, and social engineering that show no signs of slowing down, security remains a top priority for organisations. Add to that supply chain attacks, connected devices, and remote working, new cybercrime risks are a growing concern. In addition, bad actors are now using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine (ML) learning against their victims – for example, to scrape information off social media platforms or track users' behaviour and exploit certain time windows where they may be more susceptible to attack. Couple this with shrinking IT budgets and a shortage of cybersecurity professionals and businesses have a perfect storm on their hands. The opportunities for MSPs are nearly endless, from offering extended security services and filling talent gaps to adding agility and providing the right expertise – 2023 will mark the year that MSPs are in high demand.

MSP and vendor consolidation will continue

The monthly revenue business model adopted by many MSPs have made them a popular target for acquisitions by technology companies. Given the favourable exchange rate, US and Canadian firms are and will continue to buy European companies. Over the next 12-months, we will see a move towards a combination of very big MSPs and boutique MSPs serving certain sectors. To standout in this new environment, MSPs will need to create a distinctive profile for themselves and ramp up their sales and marketing efforts.

Even though organisations are tightening their purse strings and an increasing number of MSPs are being acquired by technology companies, the future for MSPs looks promising and profitable. However, to capture the opportunities that await them, MSPs will need to adjust their offerings and business models to meet their customers' needs.

Innovation and flexibility in the hybrid workplace

Flexible work is not just about location or schedules, it's about the ability to connect with your team in the most efficient way possible. It's about finding easy solutions to eliminate silos and enable collaboration with powerful technology exactly when you need it.

BY SARFRAZ ALI, VICE PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF EMEA, SMARTSHEET

THE OPPORTUNITIES that technology provides to the workforce has led to a renewed focus on equipping employees with tools that help them be as efficient and effective as possible—from anywhere, at any time. One technology-led solution that businesses are seeing success with is what's known as a no-code approach.

Innovation is for everyone

No-code refers to tools or a platform that enable employees to build solutions and create applications without the need or ability to write code. It offers an easy-to-use configuration, making it possible for anyone to create and design workflows and systems independent of IT support.

So why does this matter? Because democratising innovation opens the door for businesses to tap into a frequently underused resource: the ideas and experiences of its workforce. In a business

environment where innovation is at the top of the agenda, responsibility for it too often sits with a select few. While teams focused on these feats are not inherently bad, siloed innovation can lead to more dysfunction and inefficient internal systems.
Ideally, everyone within the organisation should be responsible and have a say when it comes to innovation. The basis of any innovation is a problem that requires a solution and understanding a problem requires hands-on experience. This is why the majority of the workforce, those who are in the weeds day in and day out, are well placed to tackle them. No-code empowers these employees to bring ideas to life, solving the challenges they face daily and making innovation a business-wide responsibility.

Continuous change creates long-term impact
Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that no-code ensures every employee will create an innovative solution or process that will turn your business into a trillion-dollar giant. Innovation isn't just the big shiny object. Innovation can be new processes that create small, but meaningful efficiencies in how the business runs. For instance, an employee working at the warehouse might create a better solution to organize the inventory or manage the schedules of other employees rather than the IT department. If these incremental changes continue to happen across an organisation, the marginal gains build upon each other and can create a significant impact.
As such, no-code not only enables workers to be more innovative but also gives organisations an edge over their competition. Empowering employees at every level to create impactful work also benefits their performance, enhancing their engagement with work and overall professional satisfaction.

More innovation, less pressure

Employees empowered by no-code have the freedom to explore and are equipped with the right tools to achieve their goals. However, there are other massive benefits like the decreased workload for the IT department and coders. By design, no-code has simple-to-use configuration options, minimum jargon, and is extremely easy to learn with little instruction. This gives IT teams the benefit of being less resource-constrained and thinly stretched because they no longer have to invest time into building and maintaining business team applications. That's not to say that no-code platforms should not be reviewed and approved by the organisation's IT team, but by empowering a majority of the workforce to build their own solutions via an IT-approved platform, IT can focus on more strategic and business-critical operations.

Less talk, more work

No-code is not just theoretically beneficial but has made a difference in real workplaces. One example is our work with Uber where their use of our no-code solution, WorkApps, brought about a shift in the way their marketing team collaborated. With WorkApps, the team was able to create workspaces specific to the various roles within the firm, that offer everything the team needs in a single location.

The customizable nature of the app appealed to the marketing team at Uber, allowing them to execute more complex programs through a single platform. This covered everything from planning to execution to reporting and eliminate delays caused by using separate management tools. The team can now conduct additional experiments, create better campaigns, and do away with frustration and missed opportunities thanks to the recovered time.

Businesses that adopt a no-code approach increase employee engagement by helping them improve the way they and their teams work. but they also gain from the wealth of knowledge from their employees' experience that would otherwise go untapped. And in an era where flexible work is now commonplace, bringing about a better work culture and a more fulfilled workforce by giving them the technology they need should become the status quo.

Putting EX at the centre of hybrid working

In a competitive job market, giving employees the option of flexibility is key for attracting and retaining talent.

BY MARTIN SCHIRMER, PRESIDENT OF ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE MANAGEMENT AT IFS

LAST YEAR, Gallup research revealed that 54% of Americans work remotely and 38% of hybrid employees would rather quit than return to an office full time. Hybrid ways of working are no longer a necessity of the pandemic, but instead underpin the future of work.

A big part of getting hybrid working right revolves around ensuring the employee experience (EX) is as seamless as possible. People need to be able to easily work together across devices and locations, no matter where they are based. It is all well and good offering flexibility, but if the execution is poor, the experience of employees will be negatively impacted.

Ultimately, putting EX at the centre of the business is essential. For this to happen, organisations need to rethink everything from leadership communication to their processes and policies. They also have to look carefully at their technology stack, assessing the digital tools they have in place to make employee-centric hybrid working a reality.

Why is EX important in hybrid environments?

With more than 80% of organisations adopting hybrid working, workforces are now more distributed than ever. Triggered by the pandemic, the shift has been made possible by the mass move to omnichannel digital-first approaches – and this has reset employee expectations dramatically. In a hybrid world, employees expect the frictionless interactions they receive in their everyday lives.

Digital is the standard and whether people are working from home, in the office or from another location altogether, organisations need to deliver smooth experiences across all devices.

To do this, they have to ensure people can collaborate with their colleagues effectively, that IT issues are fixed quickly and that employees are able to execute daily tasks in a productive, streamlined way. They also need to account for the fact employees are individuals, and that there's not necessarily a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to creating a successful hybrid working environment. This means closely considering a number of factors, including performance, wellbeing and productivity. Fortunately, more businesses than ever before are doubling down on EX, especially amid talent shortages and the lasting impact of the 'Great Resignation'. Yet, according to research, only one in four workers rate their EX as excellent, demonstrating that there's still a long way to go when it comes to achieving hybrid working success.

Better technology, better experience, better business

Technology plays an important role in enabling organisations to meet the requirements of hybrid working. Investing in the right tools can help organisations deliver these seamless, digital experiences to employees.

Enterprise service management (ESM), for example, can help to simplify routine tasks for employees, regardless of where they are based or the device

COVID-19 irreversibly changed conventional thinking about the way we work. Almost three years later, organisations are still adapting and finding solutions to the hybrid reality that this has created. By putting EX at the heart of the organisation, they will not only be able to create productive workplaces, but also environments where employees feel fulfilled and motivated

they are working on. It does this by applying the same principles of IT service management (ITSM) to the wider organisation, giving employees the ability to automate internal processes and services. In practice, this includes implementing technologies such as incident request software, chatbots and knowledge management tools, which can all significantly improve job satisfaction and productivity.

Departmentally, ESM can help employees to handle higher volumes of workflows, giving them the ability to provide better services to employees in all locations. It can enable HR to streamline onboarding, training and staffing. Meanwhile, in finance, teams can be equipped with faster and more efficient ways to process expenses, monitor payments and send invoices. It can also significantly ease the burden on already stretched IT teams, by making it easier to respond to IT requests no matter where employees are based, benefiting those on both sides of the desk.

Not only does ESM help to boost productivity, but it can also significantly improve the overall EX, reduce stress and boost job satisfaction across the board. This benefits both the business and employees, as people can focus their time less on routine processes and more on more creative tasks that drive strategic value.

Adapting to a hybrid reality

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WHEN DEPLOYING software-defined wide-area networks (SD-WAN), it is vital to pay close attention to the underlay network. The SD-WAN overlay inherits the attributes of the underlay networks.

So, low-latency underlay networks will ensure higher performing SD-WAN with less packet loss and jitter, whereas underlays with higher latencies will be mirrored by the SD-WAN and result in a poor user experience. The SD-WAN market is generating rapidly growing revenues year over year, with Research and Markets estimating the overall global market to reach a huge $7.8 billion by 2027.

Enterprises are seeking easier management of their wide-area network (WAN) connectivity to improve application performance and user experience with SD-WAN. On top of this, they need to keep up with cloud demands with an agile network that can route multi-cloud and hybrid cloud workloads securely. For today's cloud-first enterprises, traditional underlay services like MPLS cannot always keep up with their requirements. They need a network that can provide visibility, flexibility and scalability, on top of the high-performance and low-latency connectivity MPLS is known for.

To maximise the value of SD-WAN, the synergies between underlay and overlay network services are vital. Enterprises need to assess various underlay options for SD-WAN including Dedicated Internet Access (DIA), to ensure their WAN can operate efficiently, intelligently, and keep up with their evolving cloud requirements.
Defining SD-WAN MEF defines an SD-WAN service as "a service that provides a Subscriber with a virtual overlay network that enables application-aware, policy-driven, and orchestrated connectivity between SD-WAN User Network Interfaces (UNIs). It also provides the logical construct of a L3 Virtual Private Routed Network for the Subscriber that conveys IP Packets between Subscriber sites." MEF

Maximising SD-WAN performance:
Strategies for overlay and underlay networking

Intelligent SD-WAN, paired with an efficient and high-performance DIA underlay, can transform enterprise networks with a forward-thinking solution that can pivot and scale with changing business requirements.

BY GEOFF DORNAN, GROUP CHIEF TECHNICAL OFFICER AT CMC NETWORKS

3.0 is an important certification that enables service and technology providers to validate that their SD-WAN services conform to the MEF 70 standard. Rather than utilising connectivity services based on a single transport facility, MEF 3.0 SD-WAN services can take advantage of multiple Underlay Connectivity Services to deliver differentiated capabilities.

MEF 3.0 SD-WAN services are defined as overlay services, and MEF 3.0 Optical Transport, Carrier Ethernet and IP services can be used as Underlay Connectivity Services to support the SD-WAN overlay service.

SD-WAN can provide highly effective link remediation capabilities that showcase the power of this technology. These include deploying forward error correction, revertible failover, packet duplication, dynamic path optimisation and more, to mitigate low performance, best effort underlay connectivity services. MEF is also taking Service Operation, Administration and Management (SOAM) and Service Acceptance Testing (SAT) very seriously. Due to this, standards have been explored like MEF 66 and MEF 61.1 to ensure the performance of the Underlay Connectivity Service and the subsequent impact on the SD-WAN overlay.

can provide a similar service to MPLS, while leveraging the many advantages a next generation SD-WAN can provide?

Traditional routing protocols like MPLS form adjacencies and distribute link state information with a limited and static view of the entire path an application will need to traverse, both in the transmit and receive direction. This does not provide the full visibility required for key elements to make application-aware routing decisions or deliver on the AppQoE, however segment routing can address some of these legacy setup drawbacks.

Software, Insights & Intelligence

To enhance operations with an intelligent network, enterprises should consider software-defined options that can provide better visibility and insights compared to legacy underlay services like MPLS.

A next generation software-defined network (SDN) backbone that leverages Artificial Intelligence (AI) can provide a full map and state of the entire topology of the global network. The right product and partner should ensure the fastest route to the desired content or service, as well as providing a key focus on application-level visibility and performance.

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One of the top drivers for enterprises utilising SD-WAN is to achieve better WAN and application performance regardless of the device location or access technology type. A poor underlay will ultimately result in in a poor Application Quality of Experience (AppQoE).

SD-WAN is now in a mature state of adoption, where the hype cycle of pure cost savings has passed. A much stronger focus needs to be given to the design and selection of the Underlay Connectivity Service so that the SD-WAN overlay can power the application performance and user experience required by enterprises.

Cloud-First Capabilities

With cloud adoption on the rise, enterprises need an underlay service that can deliver reliable, highly available, low latency and low packet loss connectivity in collaboration with SD-WAN.

One of the key drivers for SD-WAN adoption is this demand for a reliable, low latency and low packet loss route to different cloud providers. For over two decades, MPLS has delivered predictable metrics around latency, jitter, packet loss and availability. So, how do you ensure Internet access technologies

With SDN, the application traffic can be routed autonomously to ensure service levels are maintained when connecting the user to the required service. These networks should also provide an enhanced service level offering of Dedicated Internet Access (DIA).

A DIA-Focused Future

DIA can provide enterprises with an underlay that performs just as well, if not better than MPLS, with the addition of diversity, scalability and flexibility. Whether the enterprise's requirement is Site to Site, Site to Cloud, Site to CDN or Site to Internet Exchange, the right DIA service will provide purpose-built Service Level Agreements for DIA to meet site availability, latency and packet loss requirements.

SD-WAN can completely transform an enterprise's network, operations and services – they just need to ensure the underlay network supports the overlay SD-WAN service to achieve the desired outcomes. Intelligent SD-WAN, paired with an efficient and high-performance DIA underlay, can transform enterprise networks with a forward-thinking solution that can pivot and scale with changing business requirements.