

... the benefits of software-plus-services

The days when software was only available on CD to install locally are long gone. Software as a Service (SaaS) means businesses can use software on a pay as you go basis over the Internet. Microsoft's vision for SaaS and on-premise software, called Software-plus-Services, offers the choice between delivery models depending on business needs.

Simon Gautrey, Software-plus-Services Lead at Microsoft shares his thoughts on what Software-plus-Services will mean to the retail industry.

The ability to provide Software-plus-Services requires lots of storage capacity, an interconnected network of different devices (mobiles, PCs, PDAs etc) and large central data centres which can be remotely accessed through the Internet. Itim now has this ability with The Retail Suite. Compared with the traditional way of buying and consuming software by installing an application locally, managing it directly 'on-premise' and paying for it up front, retailers can now access their enterprise systems via the Internet, they don't have to manage them, and they can conserve cash by subscribing to the solution.

Applications accessed over the Internet in this way have been dubbed 'Software as a Service' or 'SaaS'. Popularity for SaaS is indeed growing, but will not render on-premise software obsolete. There remains a requirement to provide both options, which is what Microsoft calls "Software-plus-Services", and what Itim is delivering via The Retail Suite.

This model goes beyond packaged software to provide increased flexibility and choice in deployment options, including on-premise, delivered over the Internet, or hybrid solutions that deliver the best of both worlds.

Having this choice delivers the following benefits to retailers:

Focus: Retailers want to spend their time selling products, not contending with the day-to-day requirements of in-house systems.

Flexibility: Rapidly changing businesses need options and can't be bound by inflexible software. The rapid deployment and agility of Software-plus-Service solutions provide this flexibility.

Assistance: The Software-plus-Services model opens up access to external support teams to bolster the often-limited bandwidth of internal IT departments.

Managing expansion: Helping retailers easily manage the cost-effective expansion of their estate, business and/or IT strategies, such as facilitating the merger of two retail businesses in a neutral IT environment.

Delivering user expectations: Employees need to access core business information on the move, wherever they are. Cloud services deliver this.

Temporary infrastructure: For events, Christmas trade, in store training, or collaboration between merging businesses, hosted services are an ideal solution. Software can be easily and affordably procured, deployed, and managed to fit the needs of the retailer.

Agility: Providing the opportunity to try out new technology before an upgrade or migration to new applications, hosted Software-plus-Services solutions remove upgrade barriers including lengthy implementation schedules, budgetary constraints, and limited IT resources.

There is no doubt that the uptake of Software-plus-Services is growing at a rapid rate. Research by AMI-Partners shows that traditional packaged software spending will average 6% growth year-on-year. They predict 14% growth for 'in the cloud' applications. I hope my explanation here has gone some way to explaining why I believe that the retail industry will be no exception in experiencing this trend.

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