Cloud Services Brokerage: Flexibility plus Control

Organizations are attracted to cloud by the promise of flexible choices – but they also need the control associated with traditional sourcing arrangements. Cloud Services Brokerage can meet both of these needs.

What attracts organizations to cloud is, above all, the promise of flexibility and freedom of choice. Instead of being tied into big outsourcing contracts, they want to be able to benefit from a competitive market to select the best options, "micro-sourcing" different chunks of work from different suppliers.

For example, they might want to choose one infrastructure provider to support their development and testing and others to support various different production systems. In addition to being able to mix and match at any one time, they also want the flexibility to switch between providers as the market changes – an issue that is covered by our paper on *The Hype Around Cloud Services Brokerage – and the Reality*.

However, in doing this they know they cannot afford to sacrifice the control that they enjoyed from working with a prime contractor. Early experiences have often given cause for concern in this regard. For example, the client may have found that buying services direct from a provider creates uncertainty and risk, or doesn't provide the support or service options that they have come to expect. The client may also have found itself licensing, and having to manage, multiple service integration toolsets. To regain control, clients are realizing that they need a single vehicle to ensure the service they need, and to take responsibility for any issues that arise along the way.

People matter, results count.

The promise of Cloud Services Brokerage is to reconcile the two objectives of flexibility and control. The broker can help the client put together their preferred bundle of services. They should then wrap a service layer around the chosen combination of services to provide the service integrity and managed services benefits that clients would have got from a traditional prime contractor.

The freedom to choose: a single pane of glass

The broker should provide a single "pane of glass" through which the client can view the market and select the right solution. In practical terms, this means providing an automated selection engine that the client can use to compare offers and then put together the right service with the right attributes – price, capacity, security and so on – based on hard data and real-world metrics.

For example, if the client needs data to be stored in a specific country for legal or regulatory reasons, they should be able to see at a glance which services provide that at what price.

With the help of the broker, the client should be able to model different combinations of solutions to build a picture of the best service with the best attributes at the best price. The broker should then automate procurement of the chosen solutions.

Keeping control: the service layer

Just as the broker provides a single pane of glass for selecting the right solution, it should provide one pane of glass for monitoring and managing the solution once it's in use. We'll call this the "service layer": it provides visibility of the overall service while shielding the client from the complexity of the individual underlying elements, and acts as a simple, straightforward interface to all of them. From within the service layer, the broker should also deliver the capabilities that clients expect from traditional outsourcing providers, such as:

- Architecture design

- Choice of partner and location

- Enterprise levels of integrated management, assurance and support

- Choice of technical preferences

- Consolidated provisioning and self-service

- Consolidated billing: the client should get a single invoice for all the service providers used, making costs transparent and payments easy to manage

- Single sign-on

In terms of support, the CSB partner should provide a full service desk to resolve users' issues – client staff should not have to worry about which service element is being provided by whom. The CSB provider should also take care of operation, implementation and on-boarding. It should enable a seamless journey from a conventional data center to the cloud (and later from one cloud provider to another).
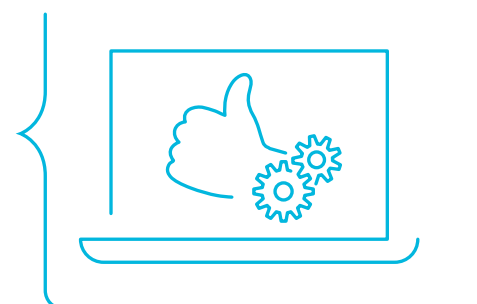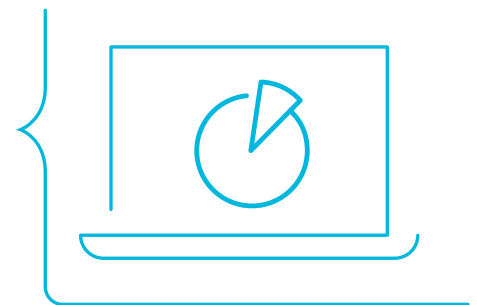
What attributes does the CSB provider need?

CSB partners need to be able to help organizations achieve three objectives that are common to virtually every cloud adoption strategy: business continuity, capacity management, and cost optimization.

In terms of **business continuity**, organizations need an enterprise-grade level of service and service assurance. This necessitates true enterprise-class tools and infrastructure (often a combination of public and private cloud), together with stringent SLA benchmarks such as performance, uptime and scalability.

Clients' **capacity management** objectives typically require a solution that meets variable demand through just-in-time provisioning and agile resources, but still satisfies quality of service objectives. Although many organizations currently use private cloud to achieve this objective, they usually want to combine it with public cloud to achieve greater scalability. This will require capabilities like flexible workload placement, i.e. the ability to switch activities from one platform to another depending on need.

Cost optimization is an important motivator for the move to cloud services. Simply putting existing activities on to the cloud will not be enough; organizations also need to undertake legacy optimization. This will typically include consolidation of existing data centers via infrastructure standardization, and acceleration of automation.

To help clients achieve these objectives, the CSB provider needs a number of attributes that bridge the gap between traditional outsourcing and the cloud world. For instance, it should have:

- A detailed knowledge of the cloud market in order to be able to describe services in a standard way so that clients can compare them.

- In-depth familiarity with the client's industry so as to be able to offer guidance on the best solution.

- Strong relationships with suppliers in order to secure the best deals, combined with independence from the market so that its advice is objective.

- The skills to integrate services from multiple providers and then manage them to provide a seamless and flexible service, using techniques like virtualization to maximize flexibility.

Conclusion

There is no longer any question about whether the cloud will become the predominant model for IT service delivery. The question now is how to take advantage of the flexibility and cost efficiencies of the cloud model without sacrificing control or compromising on service quality.

Cloud Services Brokerage, if done correctly, makes this possible. It gives organizations maximum freedom of choice in cloud services while bringing enterprise-grade control to cloud management and governance.

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