



# MSP Relevance

How MSPs Can Stay Relevant in  
the Era of Cloud Computing

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## Abstract

As more companies adopt public cloud services from a variety of vendors, often with self-service provisioning and very attractive price points, managed service providers (MSPs) are finding their sphere of control in the enterprise shrinking rapidly. What customers used to rely on MSPs to handle, now can be handled by in-house IT and faceless third parties. However, this is hardly a death knell for MSPs. Rather, it is an opportunity for managed service providers to reinvent themselves and evolve their business models to meet the changing needs of their clients in the era of public cloud services.

Read this white paper to learn about a variety of ways that MSPs can not only remain relevant but grow their businesses and take advantage of this shift toward cloud computing.

## Introduction

Just a few short years ago, many organizations were hesitant to adopt public cloud services. Security dominated their concerns, but performance, management and integration issues were all barriers. Now, however, the use of public cloud is nearly ubiquitous. Security challenges have abated, performance is outstanding, and the cost benefits are too substantial to ignore.

“ 94% of organizations surveyed are running applications or experimenting with IaaS...87% of organizations are using public cloud. ”

– RightScale 2014 State of the Cloud Survey

At the same time, organizations are not only continuing to leverage Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) for an increasing range of business applications, but many also are moving beyond this model to use Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS), eliminating on-premises infrastructure in favor of virtual hardware running in the cloud.

Both SaaS and IaaS have the potential to:

- Save businesses significant amounts of money, especially in terms of capital expenditures, licensing, support and even energy consumption
- Facilitate strategic shifts in IT away from hardware support and toward enablement and development
- Contribute to cultures of development and

innovative services for their customers

- Increased agility, i.e., the ability to rapidly respond to changing IT and business requirements

However, when organizations can potentially purchase, provision, deploy and manage such a wide range of services and applications in the cloud, many MSPs are left with what appears to be a shrinking sphere of influence in modern IT environments. For example, many MSPs used to provide email and other communication services for organizations ranging from telephony to video conferencing. These MSPs have seen increasing pressure from self-service, cloud-based unified communication platforms that IT administrators can simply manage on their own.

The situation is not as bleak as it might sound for MSPs, though. Organizations still need trusted partners to:

- Select appropriate services for their unique business needs
- Integrate disparate services and design comprehensive systems
- Simplify billing and provisioning across multiple providers
- Manage and monitor business-critical cloud systems and provide ongoing support for users and application
- Help organization develop and implement strategy in rapidly changing cloud environments

For the savvy MSP, in fact, this sea change in favor of public cloud is a powerful opportunity to become an essential component of the cloud ecosystem and develop new revenue streams that take advantage of cloud business models.

## The MSP as Service Broker and Integrator

Cloud computing technologies are increasingly expected to be “self-service”. In fact, the National Institute of Standards and Technology places “on-demand, self-service” first in its [list](#) of five essential characteristics of cloud computing. However, that term is hardly synonymous with “easy” or “seamless.” Small and midsize organizations, often lack the expertise or resources to effectively set up and manage cloud-based environments, no matter how self-service they are purported to be.

The channel is already adept at designing cohesive systems for organizations, a capability that becomes even more important as businesses begin looking to multiple SaaS and IaaS providers to meet their needs. The temptation is to pick and choose from an increasingly crowded marketplace of services, but organizations often fall into the trap of cobbling together a variety of services to run their businesses. MSPs can, instead, not only broker complementary services but also integrate them for easier management and a better, more powerful experience.

Indeed, the MSP that integrates, manages, and sells entire platforms and smart bundles of cloud services adds real value for their clients.

## Remote Monitoring and Management

Because they are designed to be “self-service,” many public cloud services have limited support options.

As more businesses turn to the cloud for business-critical applications, proactive monitoring and support for those applications become equally critical. MSPs often already have the staff and expertise to roll out remote monitoring and management (RMM) tools that ensure businesses can address problems with their SaaS applications and IaaS platforms the moment they occur.

Regardless of how swiftly businesses are moving to the cloud, all of them still have a variety of endpoints, ranging from PCs to printers that also require ongoing monitoring. MSPs also can extend their monitoring services to on-premises resources and continue to add value for their clients in all aspects of their technology deployments.

As with many of the solutions offered by MSPs, identifying the right RMM tools is fundamental to providing the best customer service. RMM solutions that support automatic discovery of endpoints and network assets, detailed reporting and complete auditing capabilities will increase efficiency and reduce time-consuming manual tasks that often stand in the way of scaling RMM to a large number of clients.

## Be the Help Desk Your Customers Need

Help desk services remain a major pain point for many organizations. When support is provided internally, it is rarely 24/7 and can be quite expensive. Outsourced help desk services often struggle because of a lack of visibility into customer environments. However, if an MSP is already providing remote monitoring and management with

a strong set of visibility, alerting and remediation features, then help desk services are a natural extension.

Businesses can save money by turning over their help desk functions to an MSP and cost-effectively ensure that users can get help anytime, anywhere. MSPs, on the other hand, can increase revenue by bundling help desk services with RMM and other essential services. Building out a 24/7 support staff also allows MSPs to scale and service markets worldwide when time zones are no longer a barrier. Some partners even allow MSPs to subcontract help desk services so that they don't need to hire and train internal staff or add new shifts to support constant availability.

Of course, the right hosted software platform is an essential component of "help desk as a service." Synchronized ticketing, support for intelligent workflows and ticket round-tripping all ensure complete visibility for MSPs and an easy customer experience for clients. Help desk platforms also should include multiple support channels, enabling email, phone, and chat connections between users and help desk staff.

## Managing Security

The natural progression of SSO, federation Security is no longer just a matter of anti-virus on the client, and roles and policies on the back end. It is complex, multifaceted and critical both to business continuity and to staying out of the headlines over the latest breach. While most large enterprises now have Chief Security Officers and dedicated resources to manage security on all

levels, small and midsize businesses can easily be overwhelmed by all of the moving parts required to secure their networks and protect their users. Again, MSPs are seeing opportunities to expand their portfolios to provide "Security-as-a-Service," as well as the consulting and testing necessary to ensure their clients are implementing robust security strategies.

“ Worldwide spending on information security will reach \$71.1 billion in 2014, an increase of 7.9% over 2013, with the data loss prevention segment recording the fastest growth at 18.9%. ”

– Gartner

With the right partners, MSPs can build holistic solutions that address the multitude of functions that are now generally considered to fall under the security umbrella. In many cases, RMM and security overlap; helping a business build a secure environment can and should be handled remotely, automatically and transparently. MSPs should be looking at security offerings that include:

- Client anti-malware for both PCs and mobile devices
- Content filtering
- Backup and recovery
- Patch management
- Mobile device management
- Role-based security, provisioning and management

For the MSP entering the security business, the ability to interface with a growing number of third-party and on-premises solutions also will help clients leverage existing investments and new tools to meet emerging business needs.

## Making BYOD a Reality

Many organizations are now looking specifically for partners who can help them make mobility initiatives come to fruition dependably.

At the heart of any mobility strategy, whether it involves user-owned devices (BYOD) or company-supplied phones, tablets and laptops, is a complete mobile device management (MDM) solution. The exact implementation of MDM will vary by vendor, but all should include a number of core capabilities:

- Rapid and/or automated provisioning of new devices
- Remote lock/wipe for lost or stolen devices
- Flexible profile management for intelligent usage and security restrictions
- Remote monitoring, support and reporting for user devices

“By 2017, over half of all businesses won't just allow BYOD – They will require it.”

– Gartner

The bottom line is that mobility, in general, and BYOD, specifically, can have significant benefits for organizations that embrace

them. Securely achieving the productivity gains, cost savings and strategic advantages associated with BYOD requires smart management solutions. This is yet another opportunity for MSPs to deliver new services to clients, many of whom will lack the expertise or wherewithal to go beyond the laissez-faire approach that too many take to BYOD.

According to [Gartner](#), most companies don't have a specific policy governing employee-owned devices. In contrast, [Gartner](#) also predicts that 20 percent of BYOD initiatives will fail by 2016 because organizations swing too far toward Draconian MDM policies. MSPs can play an important consultative role in helping businesses find the right balance between security and respect for employee ownership of devices, as well as providing the right software to implement these policies.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt the cloud has fundamentally changed enterprise IT. New capabilities, new business models, and new expectations for access and availability have all been born out of the public cloud. This has placed substantial pressure on the channel with many MSPs concerned that clients will no longer need their offerings in what has become a “self-service” world. For service providers to thrive, they must adapt and offer compelling, value-added services to their clients.

From cloud-based MDM to remote monitoring and management that incorporates visibility into public cloud services, opportunities

abound for MSPs to reinvent themselves and remain not just relevant, but crucial, to modern businesses. Those who can leverage these strengths with an expanded portfolio of relevant services will find a ready market. ■

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## About AVG

AVG is the online security company providing leading software and services to secure devices, data and people. AVG has over 200 million active users, as of March 4, 2015, using AVG's products and services including Internet security, performance optimization, and personal privacy and identity protection. By choosing AVG's products, users become part of a trusted global community that engages directly with AVG to provide feedback and offer mutual support to other customers.

AVG Partners, Authorized Distributors and Authorized Resellers comprise a distribution network in over 150 countries and are a major contributor to the awareness of AVG Anti-Virus around the world. We also provide other ways for business cooperation such as Affiliate and OEM programs. The growing success of AVG and our business partners is a testament to our strategic business partner programs.

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