

Welcome to the first 2010 edition of Insider.

I don't think you'll mind me saying that 2009 was for the most part a pretty difficult year. Doom, gloom, recession and depression were predominant themes, particularly in IT, with budgets back to 2005 levels and all but essential spending put on the back burner.

At least we could look forward to a new decade, a new beginning and new opportunities for our respective businesses to get back to normal after the hard times - things were looking up.

And then it started snowing.

With the exception of our hardier neighbours in outlying parts of Scotland, the UK reacted in the only way it knows how. The City was deserted, schools were closed and roads were littered with cars, abandoned in varying degrees of disarray.

But we need not dwell on hard times, Spring is only just around the corner and there does seem to be light at the end of the tunnel as the recession starts to show the first signs of easing off. Add to that unprecedented levels of interest in new and emerging technologies and it could add up to a few more reasons for us to keep optimistic about the year ahead.

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Land of the Giants - rise of the IT superpowers

January 27th 2010 was a big day for the industry with Oracle's \$7.4 billion buyout of Sun Microsystems paving the way for a return of the complete, vertically integrated IT company, the likes of which were characterised by IBM's dominance in the 1970's and early 80's.

As the world's major force in database and enterprise applications, Oracle has just added a significant new dimension to it's portfolio in the form of Sun's hardware platform, whilst also snapping up Java and open source competitor MySQL in one grand move, making them a truly monolithic force to be reckoned with. CEO Larry Ellison has made no secret of his goal to sell integrated platforms with hardware and software preconfigured to work alongside each other, essentially laying claim to a lion's share of the systems integration. Ever since the deal was announced back in April, experts from across the industry have been drawing parallels with the early days of proprietary architecture and dominance by IBM.

Not to be outdone, one week before the monumental takeover was given European Commission approval, HP and Microsoft unveiled their own plans to form a strategic partnership, co-developing systems and software. They have promised an integrated tie-up that looks like a direct assault on Oracle's new acquisition, although exact details of their plan are rather difficult to come by amidst the PR and hyperbole.

It looks like the old millstone has steadily come full circle, neatly delivering us back where we were some 30 years

previously. Only this time we've grown used to flexibility, choice, specialised vendors and equally specialised systems integrators. Dynamic, virtualised infrastructures based on myriad configurations of different technology are fast becoming the norm and any attempt by a single company to claw back control over whole swathes of the system architecture could be hard to swallow; but how far are they willing to go to force our hand? In the past it was companies like Microsoft and Intel that pushed the industry into adopting a horizontal focus, but this approach has left gaps in the addressable revenue available to these large companies.

The battle for market share looks to be heating up between a handful of the big players, as evidenced by the sheer number of billion dollar buyouts and acquisitions late in 2009 and early this year. The battleground is almost certainly going to be based somewhere around the datacenter, with these IT superpowers plotting, planning and forging alliances to establish control and the largest possible presence from switches through to support services.

UKN are poised to see what becomes of Sun's desktop terminals and entry level server solutions that have become so popular with our client base. Fortunately, taking a broadly vendor agnostic approach provides UKN and its clients with the opportunity to choose technologies based solely on their suitability, so if the likes of Oracle, HP or IBM start to narrow the playing field, we're ideally placed to offer a broader choice.

Gartner says time is right in 2010 for IT transformation

Virtualisation has taken the top spot in the Gartner list of CIO technology priorities for 2010, closely followed by interest in the mostly unproven Cloud Computing phenomenon. Process improvement and cost reductions make a familiar appearance at positions one and two respectively in the top ten CIO Business Priorities list, with Gartner forecasting a shift towards improving enterprise and IT productivity ahead of a straight up drive for lowering the bottom line.

These results mark an absolutely fundamental change in the IT market place. Business Intelligence consistently placed first in this list for the past five years, so for it to only appear fifth in this latest survey means that something different is going on in the minds of the world's business leaders this time around.

Gartner are putting it down to economic, strategic and technological changes that set the scene for 2010 to be the year when IT can embark on an evolution from its traditional supporting role, to that of the strategic contributor, focused on innovation and competitive advantage.

UKN's CEO, Michael Eaton, has observed a similar pattern emerging. He says, "based on the increased demand for VDI and Unified Data Centre solutions from the CIOs we have been working with, it's fair to say this trend is being felt across the whole industry. The benefit of unifying end-user services in the data centre starts with rationalising the specific technology itself and commoditising non-critical systems so IT can accurately control and measure it's cost of operations."

In October 2009 Gartner themselves recommended that enterprises should proactively build a five to eight year roadmap for client computing that outlines an approach to ownership and support, application deployment as well as the more obvious considerations regarding O/S and platform. It's the same approach that has been central to UKN's Desktop as a Service strategy for the last three years, so there are few organisations with the market experience to rival the end-to-end vision we have been advocating all this time.



Interest in cloud computing has been on a steady increase over the last 12 months but 2010 is already showing signs of a rush by IT leaders to understand and adopt this service-led strategy.

Pushing business requirements out to the cloud seems like a very sensible thing to do, with its lower running costs, minimal capital expenditure and no assets to lose value. But, (and there's always a but) very few businesses are yet to do more than dip a proverbial toe into the still rather unclear waters of Cloud Computing.

Analysts are quick to point out that the cloud is not a technology or even a collection of related technologies, although virtualisation has been a significant catalyst in allowing today's cloud vendors to create marketable products and services.

There remains plenty of uncertainty about what is even in the cloud, Software as a Service, Infrastructure as a Service, Platforms as a Service, all or none of the above perhaps? The answer the industry seems to be agreeing on is that cloud services may be purchased in any of the forms mentioned, but a true cloud strategy has to start with a decision within an organisation to deliver IT functions as costed, scalable services to users.

The cloud model is one in which the software, hardware and support necessary to address a specific business need can be delivered on an as-required basis and paid for as it

Who, if anyone is ready to dive headlong into the Cloud?

CTO Kosta Totkov writes about the hastening evolution of Cloud service, what it is and what it means for the industry.

gets used. Typically this boils down to a per-user, per-month arrangement (or some variation of this). So what this means to the uninitiated is that delivering Cloud services has the potential to be about much more than just outsourcing specific business requirements to a third party. Enterprise organisations that consider Cloud Services to form an integral part of transformation strategy may opt to develop a private cloud and fundamentally change the way IT relates to the whole businesses. Rather than IT being a single cost centre, it assumes the role of service provider, with departments and user groups accounting for any IT functions they consume.

Enterprises are also combining this approach with public cloud services, creating their own hybrid environments. Some business leaders have been quick to voice concerns about security, governance and legislative barriers to pushing requirements out into the public cloud. However, many of these concerns are exactly the same as for existing internally provisioned services. It's all a matter of governance. Process and discipline has to be enforced through an organisation so that departments and user groups, now empowered as consumers, don't start shopping around for the cloud service that they think best meets a specific requirement.

Freedom of choice is a great thing. But left completely unchecked, IT could find in the future it is stumbling across systems and applications they never knew existed.

So how does all this affect smaller organisations? It seems sensible that small and medium sized businesses will be much more comfortable with utilising public cloud services. Many companies that have been on a server virtualisation drive probably already recognise the benefits of having a more dynamic infrastructure, with the promise of lower cost and reduced complexity acting as a powerful incentive to make use of the cloud.

Companies such as Google, Microsoft, VMware and Citrix have latched onto cloud vocabulary in a big way and are enthusiastically soliciting messages that tie into their respective products. Google Apps and BPOS from Microsoft do have all the markings of a Cloud Service, but are they actually any more than hosted applications? If bought simply as a quick and easy way of cutting costs, arguably the answer to that question would be no.

Cloud services are not always cheap, they might come with certain economies of scale, but it will be the providers that really benefit from them. Cost savings can only be measured in relation to a range of factors, that when taken into account might not add up to be particularly compelling. Services still require management, administration and support at some level and the business has to have checks and balances in place to ensure demand can be met. Also, organisations may very well run the risk of losing highly skilled technical staff, either through "streamlining" or by devaluing their roles to a point where they may begin to look elsewhere for a fresh challenge.

iLiO – the final piece of the VDI puzzle?

Industry blog-meister and Desktop Virtualisation guru Brian Madden has called it the most important and exciting development for VDI so far.

We too have held our collective breath, waiting for it to materialise for the best part of 12 months and finally it looks as though iLiO from Atlantis Computing is on its way to full release.

Now, you'd be forgiven for sporting a slightly puzzled look right about now. You'd also be forgiven for thinking that either VMware or Citrix had mastered every key aspect of this technology and were already steaming ahead in the race for virtualised desktop dominance.

iLiO, it would seem, answers the final fundamental challenge for deploying VDI that has plagued larger implementations since day one – that of managing persistent desktop images in a non-persistent environment. Anyone who has been through the motions of assessing or deploying VDI will know that the established answer to this issue has been to throw huge amounts of storage at the problem - often averaging out in the region of a whopping 20Gb per user.

Instead of storing multiple configurations for multiple users, iLiO separates the desktop build into layers such as O/S, Applications and Profile. When a user launches their Virtual Desktop, iLiO builds their desktop image on the fly, provisioning components from a shared library and a database containing their preferences. Effectively, reusing all the shared components rather than having to retain persistent, customised instances of every user's desktop can cut storage down by a factor of twenty.

By all accounts Atlantis has a resilient, enterprise-class product and architecture in iLiO. If that's true it could well be the catalyst which makes 2010 the year VDI takes off in a big way.



Did your business weather the storm?

Business continuity has been pushed back up the list of priorities following the harshest winter conditions seen across much of the UK in the last 30 years.

Nearly three out of every four businesses reported some degree of staff shortage or disruption as a result of the heavy snowfall during January. For some the impact was reduced thanks to sensible planning, investment and remote working initiatives, ensuring users had easy access to the tools and information needed to keep the business ticking over. For others it was an operational nightmare.

The big freeze is estimated to have cost the UK economy anywhere in the region between £600m and £2 billion, so for businesses that found themselves caught short it's a sensible recommendation to make

sure 2010 is the year they put in place a business continuity plan.

Whilst many BCPs cover for catastrophic events, they also need to allow for possible short term interruptions and not just the possibility of snow. Power loss caused by the friendly neighbourhood workmen or a ruptured gas main are perfectly realistic and mundane examples of where an office could be out of action for hours or days at a time. Often the focus and the reluctance to invest is based around a value judgement on the unlikely probability of being at the centre of a major incident.

Risk Officers need to be in a position to assess the impact on business where normal access to the working environment is prevented or adversely affected. Much of the measurable risk associated with this is access to the services provided by IT, however with

correct prioritisation of needs and requirements, these risks can be greatly mitigated through the use of remote access technologies that are simple to use, secure and reliable.

IT Governance and risk management are becoming major concerns for all organisations. There is an expectation from governing bodies and regulators that organisations under their jurisdiction have adequate Business Continuity Plans in place to deal with threats to continuity of operation.

UKN has been well equipped to manage during the cold snap, as have many of our clients who benefit from the remote access we provide as part of our managed services. Home working is an integral part of the company's culture, ensuring not only flexibility for employees, but continuity of service and resilience for the business itself.

TECH SPOT - Microsoft App-V goes 64-bit



Tech Spot normally takes a look at emerging technologies, but with the launch of App-V 4.6, Microsoft has entered the world of 64-bit Application Delivery and it has the potential to be a real game-changer.

App-V from Microsoft (formerly Softgrid) has been with us for quite some time now and is the most popular form of Application Virtualisation currently in use. For those unfamiliar with the terminology, Application Virtualisation is an alternative way of deploying software to physical or virtual desktops that pretty much eliminates interoperability issues and cuts the complexity of rolling out and patching

applications. Software code is isolated in a package with all essential components and then runs independently of the host operating system through a lightweight client installed on a Terminal Server or desktop PC.

64-bit architectures are all about boosting performance and increasing capacity through larger memory address allocation and a bump to CPU processing cycles. What this means in the data centre is fewer servers, greater user density and most importantly lower TCO for your virtualisation solutions.

By releasing a 64-bit version Microsoft has also removed what many IT experts regarded as the final significant barrier to adoption for the App-V platform. During testing in the UKN labs we've found pretty much 100% of previously virtualised 32-bit apps, could now work on a 64-bit platform, even those which would never have worked if directly installed.

• **Launch of Exciting VDI Pilot program for leading UK online directory**

A leading directory service has commissioned UKN to roll out the pilot phase of an innovative desktop project, to provide users in a newly commissioned office with a server based computing environment. This initial investigation combines the latest desktop, application and user profile management technology to create a flexible, resilient and scalable platform for the future. Watch this space for further details.

• **Ovum Analysts carry out Technology Audit on UKN Desktop Services**

Following the merger between industry analysts Butler Group and Ovum, UKN is pleased to become the first subject of their newly updated Technology Audit Program. The document will be taking an independent view on UKN's Desktop Virtualisation Services, that will then be published for subscribers. The paper is due out during March and we plan on bringing you further details in the next edition of Insider.

• **UKN provides critical infrastructure services to NHS Leadership for Health**

A newly formed NHS organisation, Leadership for Health will be training and establishing new leaders in the NHS Community with help from UKN's efficient health sector services. They will move onto a virtualised desktop computing platform, hosted on the N3 network, that will provide remote and office based access to their essential infrastructure.

• **UKN embarks on mission for Service Desk Institute 3 Star certification**

We are pleased to announce details of our forthcoming plan to achieve 3 star accreditation with the Service Desk Institute following our completion of a preliminary 2 day assessment. The SDI Certification will look closely at all aspects of the service desk operation in terms of management, staff, resources, tools, training, strategy, planning and continuous service improvement.



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