Top IT trends CIOs will be challenged by in 2016

By Ian Jansen van Rensburg

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New trends can be exciting opportunities for innovation, expansion and growth, but as they apply to IT and the CIO tasked with implementing them, managing them, and extracting business benefit from them, they can be a challenge to say the least.

In 2016 we will see network virtualisation come into its own as CIOs increasingly look to this solution to cut costs and improve business-wide security. Another trend in hot pursuit is the growing virtualisation of data storage, as well as the growth of hyper-convergence solutions, which will allow the CIO to cut back on investing in SAN skills and divert those resources to more profitable pursuits.

Also on the horizon in the coming year will be an increase in the number and availability of management tools to assist with managing the entire data centre right through to the End User Computing and business mobility layer.

The network virtualisation trend

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Network virtualisation offers potentially significant benefits to business, key among which is reduced CapEx. That said, the challenge to CIOs is to crunch the numbers with pinpoint precision to determine whether that promise is being realised or being negated by increased OpEx, which is more difficult to measure.

Enhanced security is another important benefit driving the uptake of network virtualisation technologies. By removing the intelligence from the device, ring-fencing the data centre with a security layer and amping up security for every aspect of the technology stack, CIOs can better protect their organisation against inadequately architected cloud technologies and the growing cyber attacks against them.

The virtualisation of data storage

Data remains and indeed is becoming more of a challenge for business. CIOs need to house it, feed it, move it between cloud environments and repackage it for the business. The promise of improved and increased data storage, availability and security, coupled with a reduced CapEx are driving the movement to virtualise data storage.

In South Africa many businesses have adopted a wait and see approach to new technologies, like the software-defined data centre, and in the process have stretched their technology assets way beyond their sell-by dates in order to see this maturation achieved. While these frayed resources now demand the immediate attention of the CIO, the flip side of that is that the software-defined data centre, for instance, has matured and is ripe for the picking.

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Digital skills acquisition

The changing face of technology is also impacting the particular skill set CIOs are looking for in potential employees. This already challenging situation is further exacerbated by the current dearth in IT management skills in general, coupled with the ongoing brain drain affecting technical skills. Since the talent is not there for the taking, this challenges the CIO and indeed the organisation as a whole to innovate means to develop this talent and retain it thereafter.

The challenge for vendors

It's not just CIO's who are being tested in the brave new world of IT either. Major trends like cloud hosting and the virtualisation of desktops, networks and storage are challenging vendors too.

Vendors can no longer get by peddling the same old basket of solutions, but instead must keenly and thoroughly understand their client's IT landscape, business challenges and IT cost analysis before presenting strategically sound solutions that will yield demonstrable benefits and a measurable return on investment. If necessary, they must expand the contents of their baskets and completely reinvent themselves, just as technology is doing right now.

Make no mistake, it's an exciting time to be involved in the IT field and, technologically speaking, 2016 is going to be a cracker of a year.

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