

case study

CLOUD COMPUTING

ComputerLinks serves up a risk-free menu of managed cloud services

Simon Quicke looks at how one distributor has successfully developed a reseller-focused approach to cloud computing

The cloud poses a challenge to everyone in the channel, but no tier more so than distribution, which faces some fundamental questions about its future role serving resellers in a hosted world.

Some have made early gains by lapping up increased server sales, in demand to build the datacentres that will run the public clouds of the near future, but have not really looked beyond those rather enjoyable hardware sales.

Others have moved to become cloud service aggregators, working with a large number of vendors to help present resellers with a menu of options in various different technology segments. That approach is going to be the most common going forward, with the large multinationals getting involved in that model early on.

Cloud innovators

But there has been room for innovation, with time on the side of the pioneers as cloud adoption is growing,

Reseller story: the start-up

CommitTel, which was formed in June this year, turned to the cloud offering from ComputerLinks as a way of getting the business up and running quickly. It took less than eight weeks from an initial meeting with the distributor to signing the first client for managed secure back-up services.

"The economic climate of increased taxes, diminishing real-term earnings, and cautious consumers means that all brands need to maximise client revenues," said Shevon McDonald, founder of CommitTel.

"Starting a new business from scratch could have been expensive and time-consuming, but with ComputerLinks I had all the resource and support I needed to start selling Alvea services straight away without any cost to me," he said.

but is slow to ramp up. One of those innovators is ComputerLinks, which has emerged with a model that has been built with the channel in mind from the outset.

The distributor's Alvea cloud platform has received a lot of press in recent months as it added features and product options ranging from hosted firewalls and anti-virus to more high-end infrastructure services such as back-up, storage and business continuity. But what has not received quite as much coverage is the methodology behind the platform and the changes it involved for the distributor.

"This was a cloud-only service built with a two-tier channel in mind – everything has to be channel-centric," said Dave Ellis, director of new technology and services at ComputerLinks.

The distributor was determined to minimise complications for resellers and limit the risks, developing off-the-peg service level agreements (SLAs) for partners to offer their customers, as well as marketing documentation that partners could put their own branding on.

Adding value

As well as keeping it simple, ComputerLinks planned to aim high and move away from simply delivering an aggregation of services, instead opting for enterprise-level infrastructure products to take the value-added distribution approach.

"We sit at the higher end of the cloud. The value-added strategy is

different to some others because being a SaaS broker is not where we want to be," said Ellis.

When it came to working out which services to offer, the distributor built on its security expertise, but also used research to identify where resellers believed customers were most in need of hosted services.

Mike Worby, business development manager at ComputerLinks, pointed out that the result of that process was to guide it into the storage and data back-up arena.

To make that strategy a reality, the distributor has established a team of developers that have helped to build Alvea and extend the functionality of vendor products, thrown open a host of marketing options to partners, and invested in getting the legal side of the cloud right by putting together the SLAs for resellers.

Kathryn Miller, professional services manager at ComputerLinks, said there is also help on offer with drawing up contracts, giving resellers the services to provide their customers with confidence of uptime and a suggested mechanism to encourage regular customer reviews so the dealer does not end up disappearing into the background with the client using managed services via the cloud.

Crucially, resellers are also offered advice about the way monthly payment works and the pricing structure of cloud services.

It is still relatively early days for Alvea, as it is for the cloud in general, but the addition of services such as storage, where ComputerLinks has not

Reseller story: the established player

Having traded with ComputerLinks for more than eight years, Assurix has established itself as an expert in the IT security solutions field.

With a well-established working relationship the reseller was able to work with its distributor to move to the cloud, where it is using Alvea to test new products and taking advantage of the chance to enter new markets without the need to expose itself to risky investment.

David Lannin, managing director at Assurix, said good value-added distribution not only developed new services and ways to support resellers but helped it to stay one step ahead of the market.

traditionally operated, has brought in fresh resellers, and there have already been some project wins, proving there is demand for hosted services.

As more resellers look to get on board, the original philosophy that underpinned Alvea continues to be the guiding principles that Ellis and his colleagues stick to: "We are always going to provide everything for resellers, so ultimately the reseller has no risk. We want to help them get to the cloud, but with no costs or risk." ■



ComputerLinks provides partners with tools and guidance to help them sell services from its Alvea cloud platform

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