

# Will the Cloud Bring Rain?

While some SMEs are still testing the waters, a few large enterprises are already reaping some showers of benefit from the cloud

**E**arlier this month, Singapore hosted a week-long event called CloudAsia2010 that brought together more than 600 infocomm professionals and end-users from the ASEAN to debate whether the much-hyped 'clouds' will bring a rain of benefits to SMEs. While everyone talks about cloud services such as SaaS benefiting SMEs, the Singapore experience has been otherwise. Here's a rain check:

■ In December 2009, Singapore's Ministry of Education (MoE) teamed up with systems integrator NCS and Google to put a suite of collaboration tools on the cloud to connect 30,000 teachers in 350 schools. MoE thus became the first ministry in Singapore to adopt an open standard cloud computing platform. It is also the first in Asia to provide web 2.0 collaboration tools to all teachers in the public school system.

■ In November 2009, Singapore's Nanyang Technological University (NTU) became the first in ASEAN to participate in the IBM Cloud Academy—a global forum for educators, researchers and IT folk from the education industry to pursue cloud computing initiatives. NTU joined sixteen institutions worldwide to discuss innovations for clouds in education with developers, share research findings, and exchange new ideas for research.

■ In August 2008, HP, Intel and Yahoo! teamed up with the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) to be part of a global, open source test bed to boost cloud computing research and education. Called Open Cirrus Cloud Computing Test-

bed, the goal is to promote open collaboration among industry, academia and governments.

Has cloud computing arrived? Or is the hype still bigger than the reality? IDC estimates global IT cloud services will cross \$44 bn in revenues by 2013, from under \$17.5 bn in 2009. Of the mix, software apps will account for up to 38%, and servers and storage at just 15% each.

The Y-Generation (children born between 1979 and 1994) will be the first 'cloud' generation. Apps such as email, data analytics, warehousing, and tracking customer relationships are ideal for the cloud. End users such as MoE, NTU, Singapore's National Library Board, SK Telecom, Dell and other companies are already running some of their apps on the cloud.

"There are 25 mn users and 2 mn businesses using Google Apps today, many in Singapore," says Tan Bee Loon, Google's head of enterprise sales for Southeast Asia. "We believe that cloud computing is now a mainstream option. We're now working to develop the cloud ecosystem as we believe that not all cloud computing innovation will come from us."

Microsoft is another contender. The combination of ubiquitous high-speed 1 Gbps broadband (set to debut in Singapore later this year) and cloud computing will help create new and innovative services in Singapore in telemedicine, virtual office, and home surveillance, for example.

With Office 2010 due this year, Microsoft is taking its popular business productivity software into the cloud. "Our approach is unique because of

the combination of flexible cloud-based services and solutions with rich client apps and operating systems that run locally on users' devices and in enterprise data centers," says Microsoft Singapore senior marketing director Hareesh Khoobchandani.

The Singapore government is also prodding companies to jump on the cloud. If your company has a project idea that would benefit hugely from cloud computing, you could ask IDA for help. This offer is open for private companies, educational institutions, research bodies and even government agencies. "We would also support specific lighthouse projects that illustrate and promote the use of cloud computing," says IDA's CEO Ronnie Tay. "We hope to establish Singapore as a shared services hub where local users, especially SMEs can exploit SaaS, thereby encouraging further infocomm capability development."

The bottomline: Is cloud for SMEs or large enterprises? While some SMEs are still testing the waters, a few large enterprises are already reaping some showers of benefit from the cloud. SMEs don't generally rush in where angels fear to tread. Once large enterprises and government agencies jump on the cloud, offer proof of concept and lead the way, the SMEs will follow. Only then will we know which clouds will give rain and which will just create a thunderstorm of insecure chaos.

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