

Prologue looks to provide face-to-face cloud-brokerage services

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French IT service provider Prologue is launching Use-IT, a cloud-brokerage service with a difference: consumers will deal directly with human agents, who will capture requirements, and propose and provision a range of clouds to meet them.

If application marketplaces are analogous to the likes of Expedia, Prologue is looking to act more like a travel agent, discussing and understanding consumers' requirements before proposing a best course of action, and executing it using the CompatibleOne cloud-brokerage platform.

The 451 Take

Prologue is taking an interesting approach to cloud brokerage. We hear much about application marketplaces and multi-cloud orchestration platforms; but surprisingly, we have yet to hear of a service whereby a consumer can simply ring a trusted advisor, and then have their requirements implemented across multiple clouds. In the world of financial trading, many people use the Internet to buy and sell financial instruments. But many prefer to talk to someone about their options, even if it means paying a bit more. Perhaps cloud-broker services will bifurcate into commodity and premium offerings, given enough time. Prologue needs enterprise case studies to show the service is reliable and robust, and that it can align requirements to clouds without impacting agility.

Context

Prologue's Use-IT broker service, due to be launched at the end of February, will use the open

source cloud broker CompatibleOne to deliver cloud resources from a range of providers. Prologue is essentially delivering the CompatibleOne broker software as a SaaS. Its value to consumers is in translating their technical and business requirements through a phone or email conversation into machine-readable code (the manifest) used by the CompatibleOne software to provision resources. The platform is based on NIST standards, and will provide Cloud Broker and Cloud Service Management components. Toward the end of 2014, the company is also planning to launch an application marketplace based on the open source project CloudPort.

Once the manifest has been created and parsed by the agent, the CompatibleOne software prepares a provisioning plan, interacts with each cloud provider and delivers the resource to the consumer. Prologue provides reporting, billing, identity management, a single view of all clouds under management, and contracts with all cloud providers as a service-wrap around the CompatibleOne software. Manifests can be reused for quick provisioning, and policies can be set to move workloads between providers. The service will provide access to AWS, Azure, VMware and OpenStack clouds including CloudWatt and Numergy. The service also provides access to 35 more clouds through a bridge to the ComputeNext application marketplace.

Founded in 1986, Prologue provides IT services including clouds, VoIP and systems, and has an annual revenue of about €22m (\$30m). It employs 230, with 90 of its employees based in France, and the rest in the US and Spain. It claims on a group level the company is profitable. The French government has been involved with the brokerage project since day one – CompatibleOne is 50% government funded and employs six staff in Paris. CloudPort is 50% government funded.

Initially, the company is focusing on the EU, but hopes to expand through its affiliates, Alhambra-Eidos and Imecom Group. One agent will be available in each of France, US and Spain. Currently, three staff are dedicated to the product, but the company hopes to grow to 12 R&D heads, with a further 12 in sales and support. The company hopes to become a trusted advisor, recommending the best services for each application and executing the implementation.

The company is considering two pricing models. The first will use an abstracted measure of 'compute units' (such as that used by RightScale) – buyers will purchase a number of compute units, and use these as a form of currency for buying the range of cloud services on offer. The second model will charge consumers a small commission for using services on top of the direct cost from the provider.

The company is a supporter of open standards, and has links to the Open Grid Forum: SLAs are expressed as Web service agreements, and the Use-IT broker uses the Open Cloud Computing

Interface for management functionality.

Competition

The company believes it has no competitors in the EU, and that its differentiator is in appealing to companies keen to keep their data in Europe. Nephos Technologies and Semperity in the UK are potential European competitors.

A number of brokers and broker-enablers operate globally including Gravitant, RightScale, ServiceMesh (CSC), Enstratus (Dell), Zimory and Jamcracker. TappIn and AppDirect are competitors to Prologue's future plans for an application marketplace, as is its current partner ComputeNext.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

It has open standards, integration with a number of cloud providers, and a unique face-to-face approach.

Opportunities

There are lots of cloud options in the marketplace, which can be bewildering to consumers. Having a trusted advisor available on the phone instead of through a Web page could be very attractive to SMBs that need help.

Weaknesses

It has no customers or case studies to speak of to demonstrate this is a feasible option for enterprises.

Threats

Much of the benefit of cloud computing is the self-provisioned and automated approach to scaling. Will having an intermediary cause much of this agility to be lost?

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