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Connectria Hosting Unveils an IBM i Cloud

by Alex Woodie

Connectria Hosting, a longtime provider of IBM i server outsourcing services for some very big names, last week announced that it's making the leap to hosting public and private IBM i clouds. By early June, the St. Louis, Missouri-based company expects its first IBM i cloud offering, dubbed the Silver Cloud, to be ready for new clients, with rates starting at \$495 for one-tenth of a processor on a brand-spanking new Power Systems Model 720 running IBM i 6.1 or 7.1.

Connectria Hosting knows a thing or two about running production IBM i environments. For the last 14 years, the company has hosted or remotely managed the IBM i servers of some well-known companies, including Louis Vuitton, Things Remembered, Paramount Studios, ASD, Purolator, Ecko Unlimited, Gulfstream, and Ansell Healthcare. Today, the company manages close to 200 LPARs for about 100 companies through its three data centers, including two in Missouri and one in Pennsylvania. (The company is in the process of opening a fourth data center in Dallas, Texas.)

Now, Connectria is taking its investment in the platform to the next level with IBM i Cloud Hosting Solutions. The new offering will come in three flavors, including the Silver Package, the Gold Package, and the Platinum Package. The Silver Package will be available first, and should be ready for new clients in the late May to early June timeframe, says Connectria's director of IT infrastructure Dave Wiseman, who's in charge of architecting the new cloud offerings.

The entry-level package is split into several sub-offerings, including the \$495 per month hardware-only deal that gives customers a 10 percent slice of an eight-core Power7 processor good for 595 CPW, 2 GB of memory, and 150 GB of disk. Silver Package customers have the choice of using internal DASD or external disk sitting an IBM Storwize V7000 SAN accessed via VIOS (there's no additional charge for using external storage). Customers choosing the hardware-only option must administer their IBM i environments themselves. They are provided with full QSECOFR access, but will not have access to the hardware management console (HMC) and therefore can't initial program load (IPL) the machine themselves, Wiseman says.

The base Silver Package includes disk-based backups through a virtual tape library (VTL). Cloud customers can add tape backups for \$295 per LPAR per month. Both options (disk-based backups and tape-based backups) include daily incremental and weekly full backups

using an 18-day rotation, where weekly backups are stored offsite at Recall, says Connectria CEO Richard Waidmann.

Connectria expects most customers to allow the vendor to administer their cloud environments for them for an extra \$1,000 per month. With this deal, a customer gets a production-ready IBM i LPAR (with the first tier of resources described above) and full care and feeding of its OS environment for \$1,495 per month. That care and feeding includes full monitoring, application of patches and PTFs, and backups (the company uses CCSS power tools to give it an edge in the monitoring department). A similarly equipped development environment is available for \$1,000 per month.

Customers that require more oomph can choose the next resource tier, which provides a 20 percent slice of that Power7 processor good for 1,190 CPW, along with 4 GB of memory and 300 GB of storage. For Silver Package customers opting for full management, the price jumps from \$1,495 to \$2,170, and scales up accordingly.

Starting with Silver

In the coming months, Connectria expects to flesh out its IBM i Cloud Hosting Solutions with the Gold Package and the Platinum Package. The Gold Package is slated to deliver more application resiliency and use of clustering technology to move IBM i environments to secondary IBM i hardware with a minimum of downtime, while the Platinum Package is slated to include a high availability component (such as Vision Solutions' MIMIX) that keeps applications running when the primary server goes down.

The company's focus right now is getting the Silver Package cloud environment up and running. "We've had a lot of requests come in from customers anticipating when it might be available," says Connectria vice president of marketing Scott Azzolina. "We think there's interest. We're taking a wait and see approach, which is why we haven't committed to fully build out the Gold and Platinum packages."

But that demand could be surprisingly high, based on early feedback Connectria has been getting. The IBM i platform's legendary scalability, reliability, and security make it an ideal system on which to build a cloud business, and the industry is starting to take notice. And with new technology coming down the pike from IBM, the cloud will offer more advantages for IBM i customer than it currently does.

Currently, the list of vendors running private or public IBM i-based shared infrastructure clouds is fairly small. It includes Datanational, First National Technology Solutions, Logicalis, Mainline Information Systems, mindSHIFT Technologies, NSPI, and Symmetry Corp. There are also more than 90 ISVs that offer their applications via cloud service, IBM i chief architect Steve Will said in 2011.

The desire to eliminate owning and managing IBM i hardware is a powerful draw for an origination to move one or more workloads into the cloud, Connectria's Wiseman says. "We've seen a lot of companies that have smaller systems that want to get out from owning the apps and get out from managing it," he tells *IT Jungle*. "They just want to put it somewhere. Well, when you start pricing things using dedicated hardware, that monthly number gets to be a lot bigger than what most of them think it's worth. So having the ability to come into a shared infrastructure like this it gives them a lot of options and a little bit better price point."

For more information on Connectria's IBM i Cloud Hosting Solutions, see the vendor's website at www.connectria.com.