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IBM i Clouds Gathering Momentum?

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By:Chris Maxcer

There is no doubt that could computing is one of the hottest IT trends these days. There's plenty of reasons, not the least of which is that a new cool term--cloud--entered our consciousness and describes the remote and sliced computing principle far better than acronyms like SaaS or LPAR. Personally, I think we're barely looking up to clouds in IBM i land, and I think a good many IBM i-running enterprises are interested, too.

In fact, I haven't gotten as much reader email out of a single topic since RPG OA hit last year. I've been briefly mentioning cloud action here and there, then published the first of a two-part industry report this month. The second is on its way to the printer for the February issue of *System iNEWS* magazine. Meanwhile, Aaron Bartell's call for IBM i cloud action for developers snagged a quick 22 comments--and that's just the public response, not direct email.

Some of the emails are from companies who are just looking for more information--they are in situations where businesses are getting shifted around, where upgrading a physical box seems out of reach due to cost or readily available in-house skills. One reader, an IT pro for a manufacturing organization, called out the potential for rain: What happens if your shop isn't in some metro area with multiple connections to the Internet? If you're out of reach of the main hubs and are serviced by one major provider, what happens to your business if you're suddenly cut off? It's a good point. Plenty of organizations can continue to produce during Internet service outages, but not necessarily if everything is remote. For a short term loss, all it takes is some guy with a backhoe hitting the wrong line in the tangled mess that lies underneath the surface. For a longer term loss, we've all seen how wildfires and hurricanes can wreck havoc on companies miles away from the trouble.

So Clouds Aren't for Everyone

In what types of situations, then, are cloud-based services an answer for IBM i? I reached out to Connectria, which is a company that got into cloudy offerings well before the term arose when an AIX-running bank needed some help more than a decade ago. A few years later, and word-of-mouth kicked off iSeries hosting services, leading up to today where Connectria has about 100 IBM i customers running IBM i remotely in Connectria's data centers. Connectria has a broad range of services for these customers, and they range in size from large customers that spend tens of thousands of dollars a month to small customers who run their IBM i instances on an LPAR on a small box and spend only hundreds each month.

I go into more detail in Part II of my cloud industry report, which will hit the web and your mailboxes around of the end of January and early February, but I want share a few key comments in a sneak preview of sorts:

"It's not like Amazon where you can self provision with a credit card. It doesn't work that way. And we've yet to find anyone who wants that. If someone is running IBM i, they are running a commercial application for a business. They want better control, they want to know where their data is, how it's managed, backed up, and all those sorts of details," explains Rich Waidmann, CEO for Connectria.

"Sometimes the physical activity of running the environment is not their core competency and they want someone else to take on that function. Sometimes they need to do a change in their architecture—they have been bought or sold, and they need to get off the corporate iSeries and need to get their own and they don't have anyone internally to run it—we get a lot of those," Waidmann explains. "It could be they want to set up a DR environment and don't have someone to do that. There are multiple reasons people come to us, but generally it falls into complexity, dollars, or people driving the equation. . . . If you look at all the infrastructure you need, the backup environment, the monitoring, having staff to manage 24x7, to manage batch job processing—in many cases it's much more cost effective and simpler to have someone do that for you."

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