Have Growing Pains? Cloud-Based Solutions Can Ease Them

By EVAN WADE - Contributor

Of all the negative ways to describe a business, terms that denote a lack of growth such as "stagnating" or "treading water" are arguably the most worrying. On the inverse, it's the same reason scrappy startups and multinational corporations alike gear their practices and philosophies around growth.

Sometimes, however, too fast is harder to manage than not fast enough when it comes to expansion. Though the number of cloud-based solutions at a company's disposal does make rapid expansion easy, smart planning and measured deployment are still two vital strategies for any growing organization — especially where technological operations are involved.

A Moderated Approach

A measured response equals a controlled response. Take the bad hire situation, an all-too-common dilemma for many businesses in a time of expansion. If dealing with one employee with disappointing post-hire performance is a challenge, what do you do when your new location is full of low performers?
That's not to say questions of control and expansion stop when regrettable decisions are made, though. In every event, a larger footprint is a harder footprint to control, and imposing required quality and performance standards only grows harder the faster the organization grows.

Customer demand illustrates another interesting dilemma. Enhanced demand can represent two different sides of the same coin. If you've ever had to wait an inordinate amount of time for a table at your favorite restaurant, you understand what that means. Further, expansion might help sate customer demands, but dilution of the business can also result in poorer service due to the above factors—and thus the decline of the reputation that likely brought you the new clients in the first place.

**Technology Mirrors Expansion Concerns**

Many of the same ideas apply to the technological needs a business displays throughout its expansion. An organization may want to bring on new technology to match a competitor's functionality, offer expanded services, or replace an outdated solution. In all these situations, a measured approach and smart planning can ensure technological decisions help the larger cause, not hinder it.

For many businesses, "planning" will be the operative term. From licensing costs to capability concerns and beyond, assuming a technology will be able to grow—or affordably grow—alongside the company means placing a significant amount of faith in the technology's hands.

Take the health care interoperability crisis, for example. According to Mother Jones, the U.S. government has spent billions of dollars modernizing health care records, with little to no improvement. Failing to account for future growth and technological needs can create ripples that turn into waves of expenses and unending complexities. Many health care systems bought into electronic records systems that ultimately could not play nice with others, which inadvertently made certain types of technological growth impossible without major costs.

However, since modern businesses in all fields have more technological freedom than the hospitals of decades ago did, they can plan growth with technology goals in mind. For example, the restaurant chain projecting two new locations may choose cloud-based solutions to handle its current stock-monitoring needs, instead of products that handle individual restaurants. Or, an accounting service that rents temporary retail space during tax season could choose cloud-based solutions that make certain services available via a web browser.

The restaurant chain gets the freedom to build out its solution as needed, while the accounting service frees itself from buying full office hardware for a temporary occupancy.

**Why the Cloud Matters**

By sticking with solutions that scale out and up, a company isn't forced to reinvent itself every time it hits a level of need exceeding what its current solutions can provide. Building a slate of tools that's affordable and repeatable is hugely important for the growing organization, and cloud-based solutions can meet that need.

Communications, a universal business need, provide another example of this idea. Say a growing retail chain wants to link its stores with a phone branch exchange. The store that builds its initial locations with traditional wired telephones may find itself struggling to pay every time it links another location. Meanwhile, a chain that planned its growth with cloud-based services such as digital communications in mind can easily bring new locations into the loop, reducing expenses and complexity while harnessing the same services as its wired counterpart.
Growth isn't easy. However, it does get easier with good planning and the right tools in place from the onset. For an ever-growing number of companies, cloud-based services represent the best of both worlds: tools that offer all the capabilities of older solutions with the flexibility of the cloud. That makes moving to the cloud a viable alternative to the old way, regardless of your company's long-term expansion needs.

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