EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

Cloud technology will not blow over

Migrating to the cloud is key to educational institutions becoming agile in a fast-changing and unpredictable market, says Jenzabar's Gus Ortiz

The cloud is changing the way society uses technology. Millennials' expectations, rising computing costs, and a lack of qualified IT personnel, are driving higher education's shift to cloud technology. Many in HE are facing an uphill struggle to keep pace with the rapid technology evolution and the shifting expectations of digital native students.

Digital transformation is imperative for long term survival. It is no longer an option, or something that can be delayed or designated as a future project; your ability to compete depends on it. Some institutions may be left behind if they don't embrace change and make the leap to the cloud.

Mobile-centric student body

Today's students are digital natives. They are mobile-centric, technologically savvy, and expect their academic institution to be as well. More than half of modern students are not the traditional 17-21-year-olds of the past; many are older and more experienced in life, and often have commitments to work and family that require flexibility in how, when and where they learn. Students now require online learning, collaboration tools, and constant mobile access throughout their educational career.

Do more with less

The rising costs of education, declining public funding, and mounting student debt, have created a crisis in higher education, forcing budgets to be reevaluated continuously and creating a mantra to do more with less.

Furthermore, many institutions are looking at significant data centre upgrades – including network infrastructure and storage for their on-premise systems – to support the scalability and connectivity required for modern learning. All of this while coping with continuing cybersecurity and ransomware threats to their campus networks.

Providing online education is critical to staying competitive and attracting the contemporary student. However, e-learning applications often require mobile connectivity that can overstretch outdated networks. As colleges reexamine IT budgets and resources, cloud computing is seen as the most feasible solution.

Any initial investments in cloud technology often dwarf the ongoing expenditures needed to run and staff a state-of-the-art data centre.

With the cloud, applications and data are no longer siloed, so data is easily shared across the departments and accessed by mobile devices, which fosters collaboration across the campus

Scalability and reliability

Scalability is one of the most significant advantages of cloud for higher education institutions. Also, the speed of deploying new systems or new resources is much faster in the cloud than an on-premise solution.

Commercial data centres replace their infrastructure every two to three years to ensure they are running on latest and fastest equipment. Most institutions don't have the budget to upgrade that frequently.

These data centres often have parallel design that can be worked on, upgraded or replaced without any downtime. Standard failover and high availability are built-in, so hardware crashes can be a thing of the past.

When disaster strikes, institutions that are leveraging the cloud model don't have to worry that their servers will be affected; they have the benefit of cloud's disaster recovery and business continuity features to mitigate local catastrophe.

Security is another cloud advantage for institutions. Systems in the cloud typically have better intrusion detection, firewall monitoring and management. They also boast critical certifications, meet compliance requirements, offer data encryption at rest, and are monitored 24/7. Vendors also employ on-staff data security experts.

IT available to support campus mission

IT departments that make the move to the cloud find that they no longer have to spend vast amounts of time on software maintenance and version upgrades. Resources are freed up to focus on the core mission of supporting administration, faculty and students.

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Collaboration across the campus

With the cloud, applications and data are no longer siloed, so data is easily shared across the departments and accessed by mobile devices, which fosters collaboration across the campus. Admissions data is no longer separate from advancement or finance.

Centralised data also enables institutions to be more personalised with students, allowing the ability to track them through their educational journey right into the workforce. This helps build stronger

relationships between the academic institution and the student, and bolsters the opportunity for alumni to give back.

Future-proof technologies

Moving to the cloud provides a host of benefits. As new technologies develop artificial intelligence and internet of things applications with cloud computing, you will be ready to implement quickly.

The cloud helps institutions become agile in this fast-changing and unpredictable market, as well as become more engaged and responsive to students, which is critical to success.

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