

3 Questions You Need to Ask When Selecting a Cloud Platform

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Using a platform-as-a-service (PaaS) offering enables your organization to increase the pace of its software innovation, giving you the ability to compete better and take advantage of new markets and business opportunities. PaaS accomplishes this by leveraging cloud computing to deliver all of the infrastructure and services needed to develop, provision, and run applications. With PaaS, resource-consuming tasks — such as server administration, managing operating system patches, and performing upgrades — are handled by the service provider. This eliminates the considerable development time, cost, and complexity traditionally required to maintain on-premise applications, and frees developers to focus solely on coding innovative applications.

This basic value proposition is common to all PaaS offerings — and there are a lot of them, from many different vendors. So how can developers navigate the array of choices to find the one that is the right fit? This is not as easy to answer as it may seem; PaaS is a relatively new technology and is surrounded by considerable hype from those looking to gain a foothold in the market.

One approach is to do a feature comparison — for example, compare the languages supported by each offering, the security levels they offer, the terms of service, etc., and choose the one that seems to best match your needs. There are many functionality differences among the various PaaS options, so this can be useful to narrow the field.

Another approach is to look beyond solely application development factors and consider the complete production-to-consumption cycle of an application, including the factors that are necessary for success in the business market. This will give you an analytic framework to help determine which PaaS offering is right for your

company. If you take this approach, there are some key questions you should be certain to ask.

3 Questions to Ask When Considering a PaaS Offering

When considering a PaaS offering, there are three questions developers need to ask:

1. Will you be able to develop applications that work the way business users work?
2. Does the platform provide ready access to a large market?
3. Can you build the applications required for today's business environment?

The answers to these questions can help you figure out which offering is right for your company.

Will You Be Able to Develop Applications That Work the Way Business Users Work?

Most well-run companies rely on smoothly integrated business processes and workflows to run efficiently. For example, hiring a new employee may be primarily an HR function, but also triggers workflows in finance and accounting related to salary and expense management. Similarly, managing customer relationships may be primarily the purview of marketing and sales, but it often requires a link to production, inventory, and distribution processes to fulfill orders.

This process-centric approach to organizational management means that business applications do not live in isolation. To increase the chances of market success for their business applications, developers need a cloud platform that will enable them to create applications that natively fit into customer business processes and are easily consumed by business users.

Does the Platform Provide Ready Access to a Large Market?

In the consumer space, we see a large number of apps that are built for Apple's iOS and Google's Android operating systems, which are the most popular with consumers. In the business world, it is similarly worthwhile for developers to ask themselves which cloud platform will give them ready access to the largest possible market to increase the chances of success for their applications.

Can You Build the Applications Required for Today's Business Environment?

It is a basic rule of thumb that the market success of a business application is determined either by how well it helps solve end-user pain points or whether it creates new opportunities. Creating these compelling applications, however, is perhaps one of the hardest challenges developers face — consider the 92% death rate of startups that try to create new successful applications.¹ The right cloud platform can make a difference, though. Cloud-based platforms allow for rapid application development at a low cost, which means that developers have the luxury of building applications quickly and then trying them out in the market to see what sticks.

In addition, a cloud platform can help developers build applications that are designed for where the market is going. Today, we are seeing a convergence of cloud computing, mobility, social networking, and big data that is profoundly changing the landscape for new business opportunities. Imagine if a bookstore could scan social media and location data from a passerby's mobile phone and, based on the kinds of books he likes, issue targeted coupons on his mobile phone to bring him into the store. To build the agile applications required to capture these new business opportunities, developers need to make sure they choose a cloud platform that holistically provides cloud scale, mobile, collaboration, and big data developer services.

Find the Right PaaS Offering

Answering these questions will not lead to a one-size-fits-all prescriptive answer — what it will provide, however, is the information you need to make the right decision for your unique needs.

¹ AGBeat, "Why 11 out of every 12 startups fail" by Charlene Jimenez (April 26, 2012; <http://agbeat.com/entrepreneur/why-11-out-of-every-12-startups-fails>).

For instance, if your primary requirement is to build applications for the business market, then a platform that provides integration into your target market's underlying business systems will likely be the best fit. As an example, the SAP HANA Cloud platform provides native integration to both SAP on-demand solutions, as well as on-premise business applications. With SAP HANA Cloud, developers can build applications that seamlessly extend, as well as customize, SAP's core business applications to meet specialized customer requirements.

The size of the customer base you can access using a particular cloud platform is another important factor. SAP, for example, has over 232,000 customers in over 188 countries, which is the largest customer base of any business applications company. The SAP HANA Cloud platform provides the easiest access to the SAP customer base via, for example, the SAP Store, an online app marketplace that makes it easy for developers to market and sell their applications to SAP customers.

Finally, an important consideration is whether the cloud platform enables developers to create applications for a world where mobility, social networks, and big data are increasingly important. Of the cloud platforms on the market, only SAP HANA Cloud is expected to holistically provide the mobile, collaboration, and analytics developer services required. In addition, only SAP can provide SAP HANA services via a cloud platform. The implication is that only SAP HANA Cloud can fully arm developers with the capabilities needed to create applications that can analyze data fast enough to sense and respond to changes in an increasingly data-rich, social, and mobile world.

Summary

Disentangling the hype around all of the PaaS offerings available to you is one of the key challenges to realizing the opportunities that PaaS brings, especially as PaaS becomes an increasingly important part of the way developers create and provision applications. Asking yourself the right questions about your most important needs will help you understand which PaaS offering is the right one for your organization, setting your applications on a course for success.

For more about the SAP HANA Cloud platform, visit www54.sap.com/solutions/tech/cloud/software/overview/platform.html. ■

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