Powering the Business Web

A "simpler is better" approach to software-as-a-service is changing the way companies innovate, collaborate and succeed.

Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) is a promise-come-true for small and medium size businesses. For a monthly fee SaaS provides easy, fast, low-cost access to the most sophisticated tools and applications, as well as entrée into the global marketplace. It may be the most important business technology we've seen in the last 20 years.

By: Simon Presswell, Vice-President EMEA, Citrix Online

The business web has evolved. It offers a simpler, better way to conduct business for anyone – and any size business – with an Internet connection. It's simple in concept and execution with innovative SaaS for access and collaboration.

Software vendors who deliver SaaS solutions are able to enhance the success of the business web for their clients by delivering simple solutions that meet the needs of today's fast-growing enterprises.

SaaS drives business web

SaaS solutions are based on a simple premise: full application functionality is delivered as a service over the Internet. This can be anything from customer relationship management to accounting to HR to collaboration tools.

Now, with a swipe of a credit card, a company of one or 1001 can access tools on the web that were once only available to large enterprises with IT staffs and equally large budgets. No more painful software deployments that take months, huge IT staffs and millions of dollars. No more worries about maintaining software and upgrading to the latest version. Finally, a technology that's simple and easy.

Clearly, SaaS is ready to play a starring role. Introduced nearly a decade ago, the industry now includes more than 500 vendors worldwide, including Salesforce.com, Netsuite and Citrix Online, a division of Citrix Systems.

These vendors offer simple ways to instantly enable their services for SOHOs (Small Office Home Office) and SMBs (Small and Medium Businesses), and provide complete dashboard reports or snapshots of any function, on demand. Since there is nothing to install – no big applications nor expensive hardware – SaaS provides instant value with limited upfront investment. You're in the game immediately.

While SaaS is at its basis about delivering and using applications over the Web, it's also more. It's a fundamental change in the ways we're solving some of the most vexing business and technology challenges: cost, complexity, time-to-market, risk, and ease of use. The benefits: lower upfront costs, reduced overall risk, instant global reach and access to the kind of technology solutions that provide a competitive edge.

Now any size business can reach across the globe into new markets, offering world-class seminars, training, workshops and sales demonstrations, for less than the cost of one month of mobile cellphone usage. They are overcoming the boundaries of geography, limited budgets, staffing and time like never before.

SaaS levels the playing field

In the past, large companies posed a formidable competitive challenge for SOHOs and SMBs because of the sheer volume of their resources, including massive data centres, blockbuster enterprise applications and generous travel budgets. This is no longer true.

The globalisation of the Web has allowed companies of all sizes, in all industries, to support and communicate with customers anywhere, as well as to draw on the resources and expertise their business demands. Today the Internet is primary to companies of all size - the front door to the revenue model, offering core capabilities to efficiently extend reach to any location, at any time, on-demand.

This is especially important for smaller businesses. With the Internet and SaaS, they can not only project larger-than-life presences but actually "rent" best-of-breed SaaS-delivered tools, tapping into them on an on-demand basis. Hence, not only do SaaS-enabled businesses alter customers' and prospects' perceptions, but more importantly they alter the reality by gaining access to enterprise-type applications at very inexpensive prices.

The SaaS solutions for marketing, sales and training for example, enable any size business to deliver on-demand, real-time, world-class presentations to online audiences, at a fraction of the cost and complexity of meeting face-to-face or using traditional software services and solutions. This is a levelling of the playing field that simply wasn't possible only a few years ago.

SaaS fueled by convergence

This on-demand model continues to accelerate, propelled by the convergence of several trends. The Internet-enabled globalization of the marketplace, for example, has had the dual effect of commoditising many products and services, bringing prices down to the "China" level, with the resulting pressures on margins.

At the same time, globalisation has also increased the opportunity for any size business to sell around the world. Thus businesses are increasingly focused on reducing capital expenditure and risk while at the same time needing to expand to address global markets. This makes the predictable monthly subscription fee of a software service especially appealing – especially if that fee helps a company attract customers from Brisbane to Bangalore to Bangor.

Additionally, the agility demanded by fast-moving markets places a premium on the faster deployment made possible with online applications. Another factor is rapidly expanding broadband access, including wireless broadband, which has fuelled worker mobility and led businesses to explore new ways to deliver application functionality wherever their employees need to work.

Improving service

BT is utilising the SaaS model by offering Citrix Online's GoToAssist service to BT customers who opt to upgrade for IT support.

With IT Support Manager, powered by GoToAssist, BT customers can contact BT IT Specialists on the phone and, in seconds, grant permission for a specialist to access their PCs over the Internet, to locate, view and fix problems remotely, securely and completely. The service includes reporting tools and an instant customer satisfaction survey that enables BT to measure its success on demand. This enables BT to track and deliver valuable feedback so that managers can take immediate action to ensure their service and quality goals are on target.

"Customers are describing IT Support Manager as a 'really first-class service' that provides 'excellent and immediate assistance'," said Jan Zajaczkowski, senior product manager at BT. "With the GoToAssist solution for remote technical support, we are able to collaborate with our customers on-demand, thus eliminating the need to send our technicians out to our customer sites. In fact our customers are amazed at the quality and speed of our service, with 97 percent satisfied or very satisfied with our service."

The Sage Group has also enjoyed great success with GoToAssist. The group is a leading international supplier of business management software solutions which employs 9,000 people worldwide and has more than 600,000 customers in the UK. It wanted to improve its service to boost customers satisfaction and first time resolution rates. A survey of the benefit gained from using GoToAssist showed:

- Increased customer satisfaction rates up to 96 per cent
- Cut issue resolution time by hours in some cases
- Increased first-call resolution
- Additional Benefits
- Revolutionises the delivery of support and service
- Up and running within 48 hours - no infrastructure needed
- No end-user installation necessary
- Measure success with comprehensive reporting

As Project Manager at Sage UK, Andrew Cooper sums up, "GoToAssist enables us to improve the quality of service we provide to key customer groups, increasing customer satisfaction and first-time resolution."

What buyers want from SaaS vendors

Software vendors should be aware of the way which buyers are choosing their SaaS solutions. Will the vendor offer the purpose-built applications needed to meet the SOHO or SMB's business needs? Does it offer secure, fast, highly available and easy solutions with a proven track record? Are the compliance issues addressed? Does it offer the flexibility required both today and tomorrow?

Here is a buyer's checklist of recommendations for SaaS solutions:

- **Simplicity:** The solutions should be easy to use and install
- **Support and training:** These should be provided at no additional cost by the service provider
- **Rapid implementation for fast ROI:** The vendor should have a proven track record of positive ROI
- **Rapid and flexible scalability:** Make sure you can add or remove users in real time
- **Flat-rate license structure:** This ensures costs are predictable – and low
- **End-to-end security over the network based on industry standards:** Look for robust backup or failover infrastructure to ensure availability for customers

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