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“Striking the Right Balance” – Why Security Concerns Should not Outshadow Cloud Benefits

By Phil Dawson, managing director, MDS Technologies Ltd.

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Security is an increasingly hot topic in the computing world with the high-profile breaches of Google's Gmail service and Sony's Playstation gaming network, seen by some as a threat to the future growth of the cloud computing. The hacking of the Sony network exposed the accounts of over 100 million users while Google said Chinese hackers were responsible for targeting the email accounts of senior U.S. officials and hundreds of other prominent people in the recent attack on its service.

Digital security experts have been quoted as saying that investors, businesses and consumers have put too much faith in the cloud. Computer Associates' general manager for security Mike Denning urged cloud computing service providers to shift their focus from fast deployment to impenetrable and sustainable security.

Steve Hodgkinson, IT research director at UK-based research firm Ovum, said, "many enterprises have reservations about the security of cloud computing because of the multi-tenant architecture and the fact that cloud providers are 'big targets'."

However, these concerns should not hold back the dynamic growth path of cloud computing, which is continuing to expand rapidly. Recent figures, from analyst Research and Markets project that the global cloud computing market is expected to grow from \$37.8 billion in 2010 to \$121.1 billion in 2015 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 26.2% from 2010 to 2015.

The benefits of the cloud, in terms of driving business efficiencies and enabling greater business agility and enhanced productivity, are ultimately too compelling for businesses to ignore.

Businesses need to accept that there has to be an element of risk in migrating to the cloud. There always has to be a trade-off of sorts between risk and reward; between the benefits of connected networking and real-time business collaboration, enhanced productivity and the increased dangers involved. Ultimately, it comes down to the individual business as to how far down the road to full cloud computing they wish to travel.

Of course, these arguments should never counteract the need for organisations to put in place the most rigorous security systems and solutions they can afford to protect the integrity of their data, systems and network infrastructure. Equally, they should not forget that no matter how secure the technology implemented, people are the real key to security. This is important from two major standpoints.

First, businesses need to employ IT security experts who understand how the technical infrastructure works and can design applications and databases in as secure as fashion as possible. Second, organisations need to ensure that secure processes are put in place and that staff are made to follow them rigorously and made aware of the reasons for doing so.

If employees do not view security as a priority, for example, then even the most secure system can break down - especially if basic access practices relating to hardware, databases, etc. are ignored by IT staff.

Even with robust technology, there is always a need for high-quality 'human management'. Corporate technologies like secure ID still require a strong bond of trust and a process of involving business and employee. After all, unprofessional or disaffected users all too often pass critical information on passwords, codes and ID numbers to others.

Despite the obvious importance of security, however, organisations must be careful to ensure that by implementing secure systems they are not at the same time, preventing themselves from tapping into the comprehensive benefits that a combination of cloud computing and enterprise mobility can bring. There needs to be a balance between the implementation of secure systems and polices and the ability to drive business efficiencies and ultimately competitive edge in the cloud.