IndependenceIT extends platform usability, integrates with vCloud Air, vCloud Director

AGATHA POON

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Automation software vendor IndependenceIT has updated its flagship workspace management platform Cloud Workspace Suite. Now in version 4.1, it has extended support for vCloud Air and vCloud Director, which allows users to have unified provisioning and management – all is done through the Cloud Workspace console. Targeting enterprises and service providers, IndependenceIT's workspace management platform has done some integration with cloud providers, telecom operators and distributors to facilitate fast provisioning with a single pane of glass view. As part of the growth strategy, the company will further invest in enhancing workspace as a service capabilities with API-driven products and functionality.

THE 451 TAKE

Evolved from its roots as a managed hosting and IT service provider, IndependenceIT has a good understanding of service provider and channel requirements when it comes to application and infrastructure management. Adding support for vCloud Air and vCloud Director is a no-brainer, and investing in API enhancements should bear some fruit for the company as the multi-cloud strategy gains mainstream popularity. As far as go-to-market strategy is concerned, channel partners will continue to play a key role in driving the adoption of Cloud Workspace Suite. Advanced support and training will be key to boosting platform extensibility moving forward.

CONTEXT

Founded in 1996 as MRK Networks, the workspace as a service (WaaS) management platform specialist has evolved from its roots as a managed hosting and IT service provider using its own IP. It was renamed IndependenceIT in Q4 2013 to reflect its core competencies in configuration management and workspace orchestration. In late 2013, the company secured funding worth around $2.5m from private investors, including angel investor Jose Segrera, who is now on the company's board. Since then, the company claims to have experienced exponential growth in workspace management and automation software business, with software sales in Q1 2015 growing by more than 400% over Q1 2014.

Taking a hypervisor and protocol agnostic approach, IndependenceIT sees itself as an aggregator that facilitates workflow orchestration across multiple VDI platforms and cloud environments using a common set of APIs. IndependenceIT has about 30 employees; 80% of which are in product engineering and support. It does not provide financial details, yet we estimated it has revenue of between $5m and $8m.

PRODUCTS

Cloud Workspace Suite is the company's proprietary workspace as a service (WaaS) management platform. Now in version 4.1, the latest update has extended support for vCloud Air and vCloud Director as part of its platform enhancement. VMware customers will now be able to deploy Cloud Workspace suite on vCloud Air or through API calls. Customers can manage any Cloud Workspace virtual datacenters running on-premises or from within any vCloud Air region using either the Cloud Workspace management console or vCloud Air APIs with real-time monitoring and reporting capabilities.

Think of Cloud Workspace Suite as an aggregation platform through which service providers and ISVs can centrally manage and deliver customizable workspaces across multiple clouds and on-premises environments. Version 4.1 also gives administrators full visibility into user activities with real-time streaming of information as workspaces and serves resources are modified and provides comprehensive activity logs and audit reports. This functionality is critical for service providers that want to trigger automated workflows, application installation, configurations and user notifications.

The latest version also enables the automation of Microsoft RemoteApp service configurations and deployments, and provides a blend of RemoteApp and Remote Desktop for Cloud Workspace Suite users. This should be a welcome call for administrators that are tasked to manage the increasingly distributed operations with growing number of remote workers. From a usability standpoint, ISVs and users will now be able to access to the native application interface with just one click.

As noted in our previous report, IndependenceIT has already worked closely with Microsoft engineering to add new capabilities. While Cloud Workspace Suite is designed to be infrastructure and hypervisor independence, it hasn't yet to support Docker. With that said, the company says it is watching Microsoft containerization strategy closely. As part of its product roadmap, the company will invest further in adding new features and functionality, such as a service catalog from within the control panel and facilitating ease of management for automation tools provided by third-party vendors. The likely approach is to provide a set of triggers to monitor third-party automation engines. Last but not least, IndependenceIT says future releases will allow partners to manage apps containers as container-based virtualization technology moves into the mainstream.

CUSTOMERS

Targeting SPs, especially white-label providers, and enterprises, IndependenceIT remains 100% channel-focused. While the company has already developed an extensive network of distributors and VARs as well as inherited some 150 channel partners through acquiring Veddio Cloud Solutions, it has focused its efforts on supporting a group of strategic partners – particularly companies that have extensive offerings leveraging its APIs. Some of the reference partners include nGenx and Itopia. Itopia is an interesting use case as the company has built a completely new product called Cielo, which provides network assessment and cloud migration, with IndependenceIT API being the core engine of the offering. nGenx and others have leveraged products such as Puppet, Chef and Ansible on top of IndependenceIT' API to create app recipes.

STRATEGY

IndependenceIT has been focused on extending capabilities to innovate its control panel and orchestration layer. Taking the vendor-agnostic approach to platform automation and management, the company is well positioned to assist service partners and enterprise IT administrators executing the multi-cloud strategy, which is currently under the industry's spotlight. Investing in workflow integration and management through API enhancements seems to be a savvy move in the right direction to entice service provider partners and enterprise IT looking for a unified experience.

COMPETITION

While Citrix, VMware, Microsoft and Dell have WaaS-enabling technologies as well as robust management features, IndependenceIT says it focuses more on the master control plane and orchestration layer. Players that are active in the workspace automation arena include AppSense and RES Software. RES is also developing capabilities for enhanced user experience following the commercial debut of RES ONE Service Store, which is a policy-driven workspace management tool with a storefront interface. IndependenceIT is arguably under pressure from the hyper-scale providers such as Azure RemoteApp, VMware Horizon DaaS and AWS Workspaces, as they add more and more functionality to their WaaS offerings. However, it is probably best to view these major vendors' cloud offerings as co-opetition, in which IndependenceIT's Cloud Workspace Suite functions as an overlay to make it easier for enterprises, channel partners, and service provider customers to adopt these vendor-specific offerings without doing all the heavy lifting for platform compatibility.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS
The company has seen an impressive growth in terms of software sales and made clear of its product positioning. Its focus on harmonizing platform control and management will go a long way to make an impact on the WaaS market.

WEAKNESSES
IndependenceIT remains small with limited resources. It will need to rely on channel partners and distributors to scale its operation.

OPPORTUNITIES
As enterprises and service providers continue to embrace the cloud, they come to realize that no single cloud will meet all the needs of business requirements. The coexistence of multiple clouds presents opportunities for vendors demonstrating their capabilities in platform management and orchestration.

THREATS
Rivals such as Citrix and VMware already have a large installed base and are well-known in the technology scene. The robustness of their partner ecosystems will serve as a foundation for product innovation.