

REPORT REPRINT

IndependenceIT aims to ease deployment for Microsoft CSP partners with CWS 5.1

AGATHA POON

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While the market for workspace as a service (WaaS) is far from mature, IndependenceIT believes that the success of its workspace management software will hinge on its ability to enable effective and easy onboarding. To that end, the company has invested further in advancing its flagship product, Cloud Workspace Suite (CWS), with enhanced features. In version 5.1, the software platform is tuned for Microsoft Cloud Solution Provider (CSP) partners for the provisioning and management of software-defined datacenters, workspaces and applications in heterogeneous IT environments.

THE 451 TAKE

IndependenceIT continues to invest in tightening up its platform capabilities with ease of use and simplicity in mind. To that end, it's all about enabling effective onboarding and faster service provisioning. CWS v.5.1 primarily focuses on improving usability and manageability while deploying Azure cloud services using Azure Resource Manager (ARM). This should be a welcome call for Microsoft CSP partners, but to expand its appeal beyond Microsoft Azure users, the specialist will need to provide segment-specific use cases within the broader market. Additionally, educating the market is necessary. After all, the WaaS sector is still in its early growth phase and organizations are just warming up.

CONTEXT

IndependenceIT has been on a mission to focus its development efforts on ease of use and manageability. A new UI that comprises a specific dropdown menu (for services/functions), color themes and icon graphics has been available since the release of CWS v.5.0. Instead of competing with other VDI and cloud platforms, the company carves out its niche by facilitating workflow orchestration across multiple VDI and cloud environments. As it sees growing interest in Microsoft Azure, IndependenceIT has deepened its support for Microsoft ARM – a self-provisioning cloud portal for Azure (public cloud) and Azure Stack (private cloud) – in the latest version.

The company does not disclose its annual revenue, but it has experienced double-digit growth of 70% and expects this growth pattern to continue this year. According to preliminary estimates from 451 Research's Market Monitor service, the WaaS sub-segment will grow from \$1.9bn in 2015 to roughly \$4.4bn in 2020, with a CAGR of 18%, from within the cloud, hosting and managed services market.

PRODUCTS

Cloud Workspace Suite v.5.1 was officially released at the end of February. IndependenceIT says many of its features were added following the commercial rollout of CWS v.5.0 in Q4 2016 – it streamlined some back-end functions. The latest version focuses on extending support and usability for Microsoft CSP partners. There is support for Windows 2016 Server, which the company claims boosts experience and performance for graphics-intensive apps with configuration options such as GPU assignment. Given that the cost of GPU-accelerated instances is in line with market expectations, IndependenceIT anticipates increased adoption.

With the support for Microsoft ARM, which allows users to manage multiple resources – front-end web apps, back-end database servers and middle tiers – in an application as a group, IndependenceIT is aiming to streamline the deployment of software-defined datacenters in which authentication attributes are collected once and then reused for other Azure activities. The idea of enabling easy onboarding also complements the deployment of Microsoft Office 365 in a multi-tenant environment, which used to be a cumbersome task as customers had to authenticate each subsequent server or new device. With CWS v.5.1, the platform enables single authentication by enabling users to cache the credentials in the user's profile that it first created and then apply them to session servers for faster startup time.

In the updated CWS platform, which sits on top of the hypervisor layer, the company has incorporated server template management capabilities into the CWS Web Application to enable automated provisioning of cloud instances. At the core, users can rapidly provision server instances employing existing templates and then directly connect to the created server instances for installation of apps. While this enhancement is hardly a technology breakthrough, as it stands, the underlying principle of simplicity and efficiency is achieved by eliminating the need to step down to the hypervisor layer or gain access to the cloud dashboard for server provisioning.

For system administrators, IndependenceIT has further invested in driving greater automation with its Administrator Defined Automation. In essence, it has created an additional layer that enables system administrators to trigger the cloud workspace interface to perform a number of automated tasks such as server execution and application installation using scripting, rather than an API. The company notes that this can significantly speed deployments and reduce overhead costs, and points to the fact that not many system administrators can support full-blown development using an API.

IndependenceIT says customers deploying CWS v.5.0 will be automatically upgraded to CWS v.5.1 with zero interruption, given that everything is done at the control layer. Meanwhile, it is on track to bring existing customers using v.4.8 to the latest release by the end of March.

DEMAND TREND

While the market for WaaS hasn't reached critical mass, IndependenceIT reports that demand has grown beyond the early-adopter phase for several years now, and is picking up steadily in the US. Selling via CSPs, MSPs and distributors, the company is equally optimistic about future uptake in the enterprise segment and claims to have witnessed the maturing of the adoption cycle. This has been in part driven by the success of AWS and Microsoft Azure – a growth opportunity that some service-provider partners are craving for, the company says.

Furthermore, given that enterprise-focused providers have spent the past few years transforming their business and service delivery models with platforms and tools available for customers employing a subscription-based model, it's likely that organizations would seek greater business agility with automated workspace management. In EMEA and APAC, however, market awareness varies from one country to the next, and the learning curve remains steep. That being said, IndependenceIT has started to build its customer base in EMEA with several partners and is in talks with a leading SI in Japan.

COMPETITION

As it is positioned as an integrated orchestrator, IndependenceIT believes that the growing availability of WaaS-enabling technologies from the likes of Citrix, VMware, Microsoft and Dell works in its favor from a platform management point of view. Nevertheless, the WaaS market is still evolving and barriers to entry are nonexistent. Other 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. By traffic volume, IndependenceIT is arguably under pressure from hyperscale providers such as Microsoft with Azure RemoteApp, VMware with Horizon DaaS and AWS with Workspaces, as they add increased functionality to their WaaS offerings.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

IndependenceIT remains focused on demonstrating its strength in platform automation and is being nimble when it comes to aligning its platform capabilities with partner requirements.

WEAKNESSES

The company lacks the profile of larger players, which are also actively engaging their cloud customers in the WaaS arena for upsell and cross-sell opportunities.

OPPORTUNITIES

Given that the market for WaaS is still in the early growth phase, increased adoption will largely hinge on the availability of proven use cases. Our preliminary forecast suggests that the WaaS sub-segment will more than double over the next five years.

THREATS

While the growth opportunity for workspace as a service is encouraging, the learning curve remains steep across the board. There are also challenges centered around security and management in a multi-tenant environment.