As the shift to digital continues, Computacenter and HPE provide advice for organisations seeking to embark on their hyper-converged journey.

**COMPUTACENTER INSIGHT**

**HYPER-CONVERGED SYSTEMS**

**Reinventing the role of Core IT.**
Paul Casey, Computacenter

**Mixing it up in a hybrid world. What steps should you take?**
Matt Harris, HPE

**When all you want to do is run workloads.**
Andy Sawyer, HPE

**Noise or insight?**
Colin Williams, Computacenter
The pressure to respond to disruption and deliver the business agenda is driving some dev ops and lines of business teams towards the cloud. It seems to makes sense; core IT is facing resource shortages, competing priorities and a lack of capacity. But with an air of ‘emperor’s new clothes’ surrounding some cloud options, and with even ‘borne in the cloud’ businesses bringing operations down to earth and back in-house, could hybrid world, enabled by hyper-converged systems, be the opportunity core IT is looking for to reinvent itself?

We have brought together four hyper-convergence experts from HPE and Computacenter to discuss the issues and opportunities facing IT leaders. Here they analyse the evolving role of IT-as-a-service, investigate the IT and security implications of a hybrid future, and take a pragmatic look at the business value of hyper-converged systems.
“You can’t just view shadow IT as a problem that needs solving; you must also view it as an indicator of the services people need to do their jobs,” argues Paul Casey, Chief Technologist for Cloud, Automation & Converged Systems at Computacenter UK. He’s discussing the changing role of IT – both the function itself and the technology.

This can be an uncomfortable process to go through, but it’s the only way IT will stay relevant. It involves redefining the IT organisation, functions, roles, skills and IT process, so it’s not a simple transition.

“This is, of course, driven by the consumer,” Paul continues. “Enterprise IT users want to use mobile platforms; they expect a social presence and the ability to order, collaborate and live online as part of a modern working style. The developers expect IT resources to be available on tap, and to seamlessly integrate with their development approach and tools.”

Paul explains: “Typically, those going outside the organisation are not being malicious; they simply want to get their hands on the tools they need to do their work efficiently and productively. So we’re seeing different lines of business reaching out for file sharing, collaboration and customer relationship management solutions – the list goes on. These are often customer facing lines of business and they’re acutely aware that these new digital tools are vital business enablers.”

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“So where does this leave the central IT function? How much of this enabling technology should IT source from external providers and what can it retain or develop in house to ensure IT remains relevant? Paul says: “Let’s not forget that in the main the changes we’re talking about are with systems of engagement. The core engines and systems of record that are the mainstay of the enterprise are still the responsibility of the IT function.”

“Nonetheless, the growing adoption of software defined and cloud services shows us that the ability to predefine how applications are delivered, scaled and act is taking central IT in a new direction: one that is all about understanding and being equipped to respond to changing demands from the business, evolving the perception of IT from business inhibitor to business enabler.

“While this is resulting in a fast, consistent and agile delivery of services via cloud providers, it also poses a challenge for the CIO and IT team. They must become the ultimate service to the business. And this means working with new technologies that break the boundaries of how IT supports the business.”

Paul continues: “Software defined and cloud fuse the delivery of network, applications, storage, compute and security as one entity. It’s a big technology change, converging previously separate components and responsibilities. Culturally, it will mean a level of control is removed as previously isolated teams work as one. This is about the service and everyone has to give up something. That’s what I mean by IT re-inventing itself.”

This brings us back to the insight to be gained by observing shadow IT proliferating across the enterprise.

Paul Casey
Chief Technologist for Cloud, Automation & Converged Systems, Computacenter
While it’s a definite cliché, there really is nothing as constant as change in today’s business world. Across our customer base we see the shift to digital creating never-before-seen levels of disruption to markets and operating models. Companies are either disrupting or being disrupted. And each position brings with it its own very particular set of challenges.” says Matt Harris, Head of Datacenter & Hybrid Cloud Group, UK & Ireland, HPE

Ultimately, according to Matt, these challenges fall squarely at the feet of the internal IT function. “Whether they’re driving disruption or responding to it, companies are looking to deliver new agile processes, launch new products, extend and enhance service provision and so on. They need to be able to design, launch, scale quickly and fail fast. Then start again. All of which places an extraordinary burden on an IT department already tasked with keeping the business running day-to-day.”

There’s another problem facing internal IT departments - money. In Matt’s experience ‘business transformation’ rarely comes with a budget attached. He sees pressure coming down from the business to maximise opportunities from digital disruption but many organisations struggle to articulate a forward-looking strategy, much less allocate funds to pay for it.

“The IT and development resources needed to deliver fast reactions are considerable and often out of reach for many IT organisations. Added to this, there’s a growing trend of allocating budget away from core IT to the specific project teams responsible for delivering the new service. In many cases this leads to the problems of shadow IT as project teams take their application development environments (and budget) into public cloud environments.”

You can read more about this, and the move to IT-as-a-Service in the article by Paul Casey on ‘Re-inventing the Role of Core IT’. continued…
For Matt, identifying the problem is the first step to finding a sensible solution. “Of course, core IT leaders recognise the challenges of capacity and agility, and the not inconsiderable risk of becoming marginalised in the business. And perhaps more than most they understand that while public cloud offers the kind of development agility needed, it also asks questions of IP assurance and repatriation of the development environment. At the same time, there’s a recognition of the tremendous value in utilising cloud services, just as there is supporting and extending existing physical infrastructures.”

In evolving to address the demands of the business, IT organisations are exploring new ways to mix their development and consumption models.

And this, says Matt, is where the true opportunity lies. “I’m seeing something of a fundamental shift in approach from core IT. In evolving to address the demands of the business, IT organisations are exploring new ways to mix their development and consumption models – recognising that to mitigate risk, maintain uptime and create development agility is only really possible in a hybrid environment.”

But for Matt, it’s more than simply a willingness to balance consumption models. Strategy is key and needs to defined from the very beginning. “Transformation doesn’t happen overnight, and it doesn’t come without a cost. So the first step must be to understand what the business wants to do and plan an IT architecture capable of delivering against these objectives. The second is to strip out cost from existing environments to release budget to pay for the forward-looking programme. Only when the transformation is fully costed and de-risked should organisations move to a hybrid model – where the true enabling value of IT can be realised. It can take time, and there are certainly quick wins along the way, but it’s time well spent.”
”Let’s be clear. Right up front. IT people need to be able to run the workloads they want, when they want. They want to win back some of their scarce resource, save money and support the business. As vendors and partners, it’s our job to make it happen.” This bold and uncomplicated statement comes from Andy Sawyer, Managing Chief Technologist, Indirect Markets at HPE.

“IT’s true,” he continues. “The job of IT is to support the business. The role of partners like Computacenter and HPE is to give them the tools so they can get that job done.” Amid the technology vernacular and the buzz words, this refreshingly straightforward approach is finding favour with enterprise customers.

“We talk a lot about our vision of a hyper-connected world. It’s important we do because being able to pull together storage, compute and networking can have a dramatic impact on IT’s ability to deliver against its own departmental objectives and those of the business.”

“The world is changing, and just as IT’s role as a service provider is evolving, so too are the technologies and consumption models that can enable (and sometimes disable) transformation. We need to be able to articulate our vision, and work with customers to define a strategic roadmap they can base their initiatives and investments on.”

“We also,” he stresses, “need to convince line of business dev ops teams that there is a viable alternative to putting apps and stacks out into public cloud environments. And that they utilise core IT to rapidly stand up a server and run some test loads in a secure environment - without getting their credit cards out and costing the business thousands.”

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But for Andy, it is the ability of the technology to do a job, and do it well, that really matters. “IT departments are under pressure from the business, we know that. What they really want is to deliver IT simply and easily – to deploy a packaged environment that turns on when required, works as expected and delivers measurable results.”

“It’s not dissimilar for the business. They want to know how converged strategies can help the business save money, drive efficiencies and provide a reliable and future proofed platform to support wider business transformation initiatives.”

The good news, according to Andy, is that HPE’s hyper-converged systems can do it all. “Essentially, it is a hyper-converged stack that pulls storage, compute and network resources together to deliver accelerated virtualisation and rapid deployment of virtual machines. Which means, of course, that everything can happen faster, costs can be reduced, resources saved and workloads run when they’re needed. And because of the hybrid option, workloads can be placed and run internally or in a cloud - wherever they’re best suited.”

As with any change project, success is all in the planning. Andy concludes: “It’s important to begin at the beginning. Not only to understand the business objectives, but to get a firm grasp of the underlying hardware and the building blocks of the hyper-converged system.”

Andy Sawyer,
Managing Chief Technologist, Indirect Markets at HPE
NOISE OR INSIGHT?

As data proliferates it may now be impossible to ‘guarantee’ that an environment is secure. This stark reality comes from Colin Williams, Chief Technologist – Networking, Security and Digital Collaboration at Computacenter.

“Potentially, enterprises are securing data, information and users to known states (a point in time), which greatly reinforces the value of real-time analytics. But when is the security event information that radiates from the various tools and systems purely noise and not insight? It’s a fine balance between a mass of interesting alerts/state changes and relevant, useful actionable intelligence,” says Colin Williams.

He argues that as we move into a hybrid IT world traditional security information and event management (SIEM) platforms of old suffered less from being poor technology and more from a lack of understanding on the part of vendors, solution designers and customers of the importance of action-oriented event management.

He says that the challenge faced by legacy security analytics platforms (many categorised as SIEM platforms) was highlighted by questions such as: How relevant is this event to my current state? Why must this event be prioritised over others? What commonality exists between this event and others of a similar nature? and what is the business impact in real terms of acting on this event, or not?

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Colin Williams
Chief Technologist, Networking, Security and Digital Collaboration, Computacenter
Colin continues: "Whilst perhaps simplistic, questions of this nature illustrate that although the legacy platforms might have excelled in data collection and correlation, they struggled to package outcomes as meaningful insight. Thankfully, modern data analytics platforms benefit greatly both from major advancements in data science and intelligence and from massively increased processing power available in hardware platforms and cloud-based platforms. This enables the delivery of real-time, relevant and 'actionable' insight to both security operations and business users.

For the modern, digital enterprise, this insight has a vital role to play in data loss prevention (DLP) activities, as Colin explains. "Prevention is getting harder with new threats daily, mutants of old threats and human error in this lightning speed digital world. This is turning the spotlight on the importance of accelerated remediation. The CISO may be a point of accountability, but cannot fight the battle alone. User education as an ongoing, prioritised activity is now a mandatory element of effective security defence. Informed and educated users are human endpoints: their awareness and action when confronted by security anomalies is key to helping an enterprise remain secure.

There are few security attacks that are not based on a human element for their success. This is where DLP can deliver tremendous value when it is aligned with a rigorous programme of user education. By analysing the movement of company digital data assets across a network, external transfer or via physical means and triggered by effective classification, DLP will help both users and the organisation to minimise data leakage.

“It’s getting harder to find the haystack, much less the needle. As we strive to secure information in this highly digital world, educated users, actionable insight with people and systems working and fighting together is the only chance we have to win the battle.”
WHY COMPUTACENTER AND HPE FOR HYPER-CONVERGED SYSTEMS?

Computacenter and HPE have decades of experience helping enterprise organisations embrace new computing models – to address IT challenges and to build platforms that enable true business transformation. As we move into a hybrid world, the role of trusted and proven partners is crucial as organisations embark on their hyper-converged journey.

**ABOUT MATT**
Matt Harris joined HPE in 2004 and runs their Datacenter and Hybrid Cloud Group across the UK&I. Having held numerous sales and leadership roles at HPE over the last 10 years, he is currently responsible for all traditional datacenter technologies, as well as new innovations in software defined architectures and integrated solutions, including HPE’s Synergy & Hyperconverged portfolio.

Computacenter and HPE are experienced partners, working together to help customers deconstruct their business, identify the pain points, define the use cases and deliver real business benefit. It’s something we have been doing together on hyper-converged for some time. We have a wealth of expertise and supporting success stories. And know how to make it all work – simply and cost effectively. Perhaps more importantly, we know when it won’t. And we’re always happy to be clear about that.

**ABOUT ANDY**
Andy is a technically focused manager with 25 years’ experience in leading software and networking teams within multinational corporations. Andy has a demonstrable track record of managing change and of leading improvements in business development in rapidly evolving environments.
As our clients make the shift to digital in a world where data is proliferating exponentially, we are ideally positioned to support their transformation in our role as the Digital Services Enabler. We have invested in what matters to the CIO and embraced the digital workplace. Our solutions and services enable our clients to turn their information and data into valuable insight, in terms of both IT operations and the end user experience that’s how we at Computacenter enable users and their business.

ABOUT COLIN
With 20 plus years in IT solutions and leadership roles in organisations such as Compaq, Action, BT, Morse and Hewlett Packard, Colin has established a reputation as an innovative technology strategist. He utilises a unique perspective on the market, vendors and strategy to deliver thought provoking blogs, strategic consulting and market insight. At Computacenter he focuses on strategy, demand creation, solution development and customer enablement. Colin is tasked with creating differentiated propositions to accelerate Computacenter’s professional services and solutions growth. He analyses the market, the aims and desires of customers (both now and in the future) and formulates strategies to ensure our solutions leverage the most optimum vendor technologies, delivered via Computacenter services teams, to allow customers to realise their business outcomes.

One of our strengths is an ability to look back as well as forward. So we continue to help our customers run and sustain their core legacy platforms, whilst supporting their software defined and cloud journeys with new technologies and process change. Our focus on security is also incredibly relevant on this journey. We recognise that security has to be built as part of your platform from day one, not added on as an afterthought. It’s the only way to move forward securely and we’re seen as a safe partner in this respect because we’ve been there before.

ABOUT PAUL
Paul joined Computacenter in 1999 as a consultant and has held various roles within the Professional Services and Solutions business, including Technology Leader and Practice Leader for Virtualisation and Automation technologies. Paul’s current role includes responsibility for cloud computing, supporting the data center line of business and heading up the Practice Leader community within the UK Solutions business.
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Talk to us about how we can help you on your hyper-converged journey.
computacenter.com

Enabling users and their business

Computacenter is Europe’s leading independent provider of IT infrastructure services, enabling users and their business. We advise organisations on IT strategy, implement the most appropriate technology, optimise its performance, and manage our customers’ infrastructures. In doing this we help CIOs and IT departments in enterprise and corporate organisations maximise productivity and the business value of IT for internal and external users.