REPORT REPRINT

Tata aims to give enterprise IT control and visibility with IZO Private Cloud

AGATHA POON

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It has been a busy few months for Tata Communications since its global launch of IZO Private Cloud (aka enterprise private cloud) late last year. It is delivered out of nine datacenters across Europe and Asia-Pacific, and the telco says that the core capability of IZO Private Cloud is to put enterprise IT back in the driver's seat with full visibility and control over resources running across multiple IT environments (dedicated, virtual or cloud). To that end, IZO Private Cloud is optimized to enable full orchestration of IT resources using a self-service management console, Tata Communications says. The next step is to deepen integration of services both horizontally and vertically, as well as extend manageability to a portfolio of managed services and cloud platforms (both Tata's and third-party-operated) as part of the integrated management framework.

THE 451 TAKE

With IZO Private Cloud, Tata Communications has defined its business focus within the enterprise segment. Using a proprietary management framework to underpin its cloud platform, the company is able to address enterprise concerns over security and compliance while working toward simplifying IT infrastructure management. Using an umbrella branding strategy seems to be a smart move if the company is to bring forth a coherent network-enabled cloud strategy. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement when it comes to delivering a fully orchestrated cloud experience down to the physical network layer. With growing competition in the hybrid IT management arena, we anticipate that the company will have to be more aggressive to generate enough enterprise attention down the road.

CONTEXT

Using an umbrella branding strategy – IZO – Tata hopes to deliver a coherent network-enabled cloud story. The company notes that it's more than just a marketing message. In the back end, the engineering teams for networking and datacenter and cloud products work side by side to deliver an integrated 'network aware' cloud experience. Unveiled in late 2014, the IZO platform comprises three variables: IZO Public Connect, IZO Private Connect and IZO Internet WAN. For now, IZO Private Cloud customers connect to third-party clouds via public Internet by default. Customers that want to get connected to third-party clouds (Google, AWS, Microsoft Azure and Salesforce), on-premises or hosted environments using the IZO cloud-enablement platform will need to go through a two-step process to get the configuration set up. Tata says a self-service capability is on the roadmap; customers will then be able to self-provision the IZO platform using the same cloud-orchestration engine.

Tata Communications reported $154bn Indian rupees ($2.3bn) for the nine months of FY 2016 ended December 31, 2015, up by 2.1% YoY. The company's cloud business is grouped under its datacenter business, which stood at INR8.26bn for the nine months ended December 31, 2015 – the largest revenue share of its managed services portfolio.

PRODUCTS

IZO Private Cloud provided at launch a core set of self-service features such as provisioning of cloud resources (server – VMware and KVM – storage and networking), workload management across multiple IT environments, and chargeback and show-back capabilities with role-based access. The cloud platform embraces an open architecture using the Open-Stack Kilo release, yet enables greater security and control, such as configurable RBAC implementation and IP address management, through a proprietary management framework that works alongside OpenStack. With the added management layer, admins can have full visibility into user activity – all the way down to the sub-user level – and be able to enforce backup and security policies across the entire organization. This is significant for enterprises that require detailed audit logs of every interaction for compliance purposes.

In its latest version, the company has made object storage available for customers. Thus, IZO Private Cloud customers are now able to deploy compute and storage at scale. Additionally, it claims to have delivered a more integrated cloud experience by investing further in automation and service management. By putting the notion of 'my cloud' into practice, admins can create multiple environment templates (e.g., corporate service, engineering and R&D); allocate cloud resources (servers, storage and networking); and define power users and sub users with role-based access for each business function/service-specific cloud environment, yet manage, orchestrate and monitor various cloud environments from within the organization using an all-in-one dashboard. Reallocation of resources between different power users (business units) for optimal use of resource pool at a given time is possible, but it's done manually at the admin level. Using the business-rules approach, however, Tata says this process can be easily automated to further support enterprise IT operations.

IZO Private Cloud is not yet available in the US, but the company says it's more of a timing issue rather than technology availability. With that said, US customers can get access to IZO Private Cloud out of the nine geographically distributed datacenters (four in India, two in Singapore, one in Hong Kong and two in the UK).

TECHNOLOGY

With regard to the 'single pane of glass' view across multiple IT environments (dedicated, public and private clouds), the implementation of a configuration management database is critical, Tata says. Aside from bare-metal orchestration, which is not yet available in this version, customers can manage and orchestrate both Tata-operated and third-party-hosted cloud platforms using a single management console. At present, Tata supports AWS and Microsoft for public cloudbursting, but it can extend capabilities to other third-party public clouds through API calls. It has already provided visibility into IT infrastructure services, such as distributed denial of service, sitting on top of IZO Private Cloud through a 'single pane of glass' view and is advancing its pace of development to extend service management to other IT infrastructure components such as security incident management, firewall management and change management in future releases. 451 Research was able to run through the provisioning cycle and dashboard, and we found the design to be pragmatic and well-thought-out.

CUSTOMERS

The company has garnered more than a dozen customers for IZO Private Cloud and claims to have a strong pipeline of prospective customers – with a few dozen companies running proofs of concept. Tata is targeting the enterprise segment and says deployments of 10-100 VMs are the sweet spot. While the e-commerce segment has emerged as the early cloud adopter, use cases are application-specific rather than vertically driven, according to the company. In terms of cloud usage, Tata says most customers deploy 25-50 VMs. It claims to have experienced a strong growth (40-50%) in the cloud business, but it started from a small base.

COMPETITION

The competitive cloud landscape in India is evolving fast; local cloud providers are ramping up their offerings, and foreign providers are investing further in strengthening their position in the local market. Tata's primary competition in the cloud infrastructure service arena comes from local managed cloud and datacenter providers such as Sify Technologies, Netmagic Solutions (an NTT Communications company), Nxtra Data and HCL Infosystems. Niche players such as CtrlS and XcellHost also offer a broad portfolio of cloud services for the local business community. Cloud startup NxtGen looks to shake up India's cloud computing market with a hyperconverged infrastructure, which the company calls an 'Infinite Datacenter' strategy. Other contenders include leading IT providers such as Capgemini, Wipro, Infosys, TCS, Tech Mahindra, Microland, HCL Technologies and Mindtree. Global technology providers and Internet heavyweights such as Microsoft, IBM, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Dimension Data, AWS and Google are not foreign to Indian business organizations and are eager to be the global partner for Indian companies growing beyond their home turf. US-based cloud players such as Rackspace and SoftLayer have a vested interest in India's cloud market as well.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS
Tata continues to focus its attention on enabling hybrid IT deployments with enhanced management capabilities, and its ability to provide greater control and visibility down to the sub-user level is instrumental in getting CIO buy-in.

WEAKNESSES
Using an umbrella branding strategy seems to be a logical move, but the company still needs to deepen integration to the physical network layer if it is to leverage its network strength.

OPPORTUNITIES
Enterprises increasingly operate in a hybrid manner for business agility, yet they lack a mechanism or expertise to manage multiple IT environments in an integrated fashion. This should open up opportunities for cloud integrators such as Tata.

THREATS
Tata is not the only game in enabling hybrid IT management. Competition comes from every corner with providers large and small looking to be the aggregation point.