

Microsoft Unveils 'Turnkey' Cloud Appliance

Paul McDougall, InformationWeek

Microsoft on Monday unveiled a preconfigured system designed to help businesses move to cloud computing quickly and efficiently without disrupting existing IT operations.

The Windows Azure platform appliance consists of the Windows Azure cloud operating system, Microsoft SQL Azure, and, according to the company, "a Microsoft-specified configuration" of network, storage, and server hardware.

Cloud computing is a new wave IT architecture under which enterprises tap applications and data from a central location that is often hosted by a third party. In addition to Microsoft, the market for technology to power cloud systems is attracting big investments from tech giants like IBM and Google, as well as hardware makers.

Hewlett-Packard, Dell, and Fujitsu have signed agreements to offer versions of the Windows Azure platform appliance based on their own gear, Microsoft said. eBay, meanwhile, has successfully tested the offering and is moving some of its Web pages to Microsoft's cloud.

"By adopting the Windows Azure platform appliance, customers will have a clear path to adopt a proven cloud platform that integrates with their existing investments and expertise," said Bob Muglia, president of Microsoft's Server and Tools division, in a statement.

HP's pact with Microsoft extends a \$250 million infrastructure-to-application partnership the companies announced earlier this year. HP will provide data center hosting services for Azure users, and Converged Infrastructure blueprints and equipment for enterprises that wish to run Azure internally.

Dell will use the Windows Azure platform appliance as a foundation through which it will deliver its Dell platform-as-a-service Cloud. Fujitsu, for its part, will deploy the appliance in its datacenters in Japan to serve its internal needs and those of some of its customers.

"Our partnership with Microsoft truly reflects Fujitsu's cloud strategy and will no doubt break new ground in contributing to the creation of an IT-networked society," said Kazuo Ishida, Fujitsu's senior VP for IT services, in a statement.

eBay, meanwhile, will become one of the first enterprise users of the Windows Azure platform appliance. The online auctioneer plans to employ the appliance at two of its datacenters. Ebay has wrapped up a successful test of Windows Azure, and has, somewhat ironically, handed off its listings page for Apple iPads to

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Microsoft's public cloud.

"Joint engineering on the Windows Azure platform appliance with eBay's massive, high-volume systems allows Microsoft to demonstrate its leadership in this space and helps eBay improve our user experience through a flexible, scalable, and cost-effective solution," said eBay technology VP James Barrese, in a statement.

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