Accenture is two-thirds deployed on public cloud, takes ACP serverless

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Accenture has moved more than 60% of its estate onto the public cloud, largely Amazon Web Services (some Microsoft Azure and others), and is transitioning its core Accenture Cloud Platform (ACP) to a serverless model, standardizing on AWS Lambda. It has delivered some 400 new features in the past year driven by client requests and ships a new release of ACP every month. Accenture has deepened its relationships with AWS, Microsoft and Google since last year as it seeks to become the preferred global technology services integrator for each. It’s also created a Cloud Optimization Service designed to help control cloud sprawl and cost management.

**THE 451 TAKE**

Accenture believes the agility of operations is now the key business objective for companies migrating to the cloud – surpassing cost savings – and requires a ‘cloud first’ approach in order to be achieved. ACP is positioned as a way for organizations to do this, bridging the gap between the old world of IT and the new ‘as a service’ world, between traditional and digital business. Recently going serverless enables ACP to meet the different needs of organizations moving to the cloud – each has its own time frames, customizations, service and integration requirements.

**ACP - NOW SERVERLESS**

A new generation of ACP has been architected for a serverless environment – AWS Lambda. The company started rolling out in November 2016 to solve, it says, a set of business challenges that are common to any product group in a large enterprise faced with a fast-growing market disruption like cloud – speed, budget and commercial alignment to market needs. Accenture previewed this work at AWS re:Invent at the end of 2016. The speed challenge involved how to most efficiently, repeatedly and cost-effectively modernize and migrate applications and DevOps to securely, efficiently and cost-effectively support and manage traditional DTC to new and evolving cloud services that are arriving and advancing at a rapid pace.

Accenture knows from its own cloud journey that the cost challenge is keeping pace with the volume and velocity of new deployments, so the company needed a way to disconnect cloud growth from cost growth. It found the only way to do that is to create a platform that allows other users of the ACP cloud ecosystem to serve themselves and others. As far as commercial alignment to market needs goes, it finds customers want everything as a service and to pay on a unit consumption basis. The challenge is the number of units of measure is growing rapidly. Going serverless allows Accenture to dial the unit of consumption all the way down to a specific customer function, like ‘update CMDB’ or ‘put a server to sleep.’ It’s done at prices that are fractions of a penny. It has defined three speeds of delivery and created ‘rings.’ In ring zero, it deploys code multiple times per day and is where the core multi-sided, multi-tenant platform lives. In ring one, it brings features out on a monthly basis. A different engineering team creates the standard features and functions that users of ACP see. Ring two is where client projects live.

ACP can be extended, integrated and tailored for specific customer uses. Accenture has found that in addition to generic cloud management, it’s always necessary to strategize and plan both new and existing DevOps models. Roles, access, systems and services all have to be integrated into one control plane to effectively use cloud at scale. The company finds most one-app startups create their own; however, enterprises typically have thousands of apps, so Accenture offers its own platform, ACP, delivered as a managed service. Each project has its own time frame and it’s here that Accenture says ACP’s serverless architecture delivers the greatest value. If a client needs a new service managed, through ACP’s catalog, a guide and set of APIs enables its consultants to extend the platform accordingly.
**TECHNOLOGY**

ACP is a centralized, consolidated multi-cloud management platform supporting advanced, native cloud technology providers (public, private, legacy) orchestrated through its centralized dashboard and service catalog as-a-service delivery, billing consolidation, blueprinting for automated application deployment, and analytics; a management platform with enterprise-level security management and end-to-end support services. It acts as an ‘Uber app’ for cloud service consumption.

ACP includes comprehensive provisioning of VMs and cloud estate management on AWS, Azure and Google, and a robust catalog of application services for Oracle Fusion, Apache, SharePoint, Sitecore, the Accenture DevOps Platform (ADOP), SQL Server, SAP, SAP Hybris, Accenture Lightweight Platform for Java (MySQL, Apache), MySQL and RabbitMQ. Together these address migration, modernization and management. By creating repeatable templates combining ACP blueprints and catalog offerings, organizations benefit from a dynamic architecture centrally managed with enterprise-level security through a single pane. The provisioning function provides deployment for heavyweight middleware tools such as Oracle, unlike most cloud management platforms that typically provision tools such as WordPress.

Accenture claims ACP enables customers to design and deploy 75% faster, or from 1,000 hours to an average of 200 per server farm, to cut workload migration time by 50% (Accenture itself has scaled and industrialized migrations, moving more than 1,000 workloads a month), reduce compute cost by 40% and lower management cost by 35%. ACP works with seven cloud providers – Accenture’s emphasis is on the hyperscale leaders: AWS, Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud Platform.

Toward the end of 2016, Accenture updated ACP with new capabilities, including the piloting of a new cloud optimization service designed to help control cloud sprawl and reduce cloud spending. It is an end-to-end service for managing and optimizing cloud spending as a managed service or as part of a consulting offering. It includes discovery and assesses and analyzes provisioning operations across entire cloud estates, in addition to enabling (through its resource groups and tagging policy capabilities) automated, actionable recommendations, operational improvement and cost savings.

At its core, Accenture and ACP provide organizations with end-to-end, collaborative assessment through the gathering of business requirements, review of expenditures and organization of DevOps to develop an optimal cloud migration and management strategy and execution plan across cloud portfolios. ACP delivers proactive monitoring to establish visibility and control through analytics, targeted alerts and automated reporting. It’s designed to provide actionable recommendations and ongoing refinement and implementation. ACP works across all AWS regions and availability zones, provides native support for AWS CloudFormation, has centralized tag management (across cloud providers), and a new cost management feature works across all AWS regions and datacenters, it’s no longer limited just to VMs.

**ACCENTURE ON AWS**

More than 60% of Accenture’s own portfolio offerings are in the public cloud and it expects a further 30% to move in the next two years. For comparison, most organizations are estimated at about 10% in terms of their public cloud deployment. Over the past year, Accenture has seen a spike in its own consumption of cloud resources. Accenture’s virtual machine count has grown by 50% and public cloud spending increased over 100%. The use of larger VM types, with over 3x growth in non-VM types or PaaS resource usage, and storage use increased nearly 3x in the same time frame.

**ACCENTURE AWS BUSINESS GROUP**

Accenture and AWS have jointly extended investment into the Accenture AWS Business Group formed in 2015, with great results in the first 12 months, having trained 2,000 Accenture technologists and earned 500 AWS certifications. It also supported mass migrations and digital transformations for the Fortune 500, including Hess, Enel, Mediaset, Talen Energy and Avalon Healthcare Solutions.
Accenture’s IoT capability has been integrated via CPaaS with AWS Cloud infrastructure and business services; there is an expanded suite of transformation services to help customers move existing applications to and develop new applications on AWS (it uses partners such as migration tools like Racemi and Double-Take) while the Accenture Insights Platform has been certified by HITRUST and expanded to integrate with AWS data and analytics capabilities. One Accenture client, GRTgaz, the French natural gas transmission system operator, has deployed a cloud-based infrastructure on Amazon Web Services to shorten release cycles from up to 12 weeks to 10 days. GRTgaz achieved a 30% reduction in IT infrastructure costs, resolved incidents 20% faster and increased availability from 54 to 90%, Accenture claims. Other ACP users include BT Sport, Michelin, AGL Energy, Wi2, EMC and NetHope.

**COMPETITION**

While ACP offers a single point of control, it’s modular and not architected in such a way that it would result in a ‘single glass of pain’ experience for customers seeking to avoid lock-in and to retain control. There are a dozen or so core services and other functions that are traded in and out. It’s being fitted with a new billing engine that can support scale deployments, for instance, as any reasonably sized large Amazon estate can equate to upwards of 100 million rows of monthly data. Monitoring, blueprinting and provisioning are among the core features; however, customers may choose to use stand-alone migration, analytics and cost control tools, for instance.

The competitive landscape continues to be rival systems integrators and global companies with competing ICT portfolios, including Capgemini, CSC, Deloitte, Fujitsu, IBM, Hewlett Packard Enterprise and Indian heritage firms Cognizant, HCL, Infosys, Wipro, TCS and Tech Mahindra. The rise of the cloud service broker sector sees telcos and network service providers seeking to assume the role of cloud manager, including CenturyLink, BT, Deutsche Telekom, Telefonica, Vodafone, NTT, Orange and Verizon. Many of the latter group have holistic network visibility and application-delivery product stories that many in the cloud space aren’t able to tell.

Other firms with a multi-cloud management capability include CloudGenera, Turbonomic, DivvyCloud, RightScale, VMware, RackNap, Cisco CliQr, Embotics, Scalr, InContinuum, SixSq, Neosratus, Prologue, Ensim, AppDirect and Abiquo.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SWOT ANALYSIS</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STRENGTHS</strong></td>
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<td>The great strength here is that Accenture is undertaking (if not outright leading) this cloud transformation journey well as bottling and selling its experience to customers as part of the ‘journey to cloud’ offering. The firm is well positioned and is attracting a broad range of talent to its ranks, like former Verizon cloud chief Siki Giunta. More than 64% of Accenture's own IT operations are in the public cloud and it expects a further 25% to move in the next 12-18 months.</td>
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<td><strong>WEAKNESSES</strong></td>
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<td>Getting the economics and technical capabilities right are only one part of the requirement. Scale and organization-wide deployments require investment, political will and change management, most of which are outside of Accenture's control and vary widely between different organizations, but Accenture has the blueprint based on multiple successes with the Fortune 500 to help organizations address these challenges.</td>
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<td><strong>OPPORTUNITIES</strong></td>
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<td>As ‘cloud first’ becomes a standard operating model (38% of organizations surveyed by 451 Research’s Voice of The Enterprise expect cloud to be their de facto IT platform), Accenture’s cloud strategy and ACP is focused on addressing customers’ three biggest challenges - migration, modernization and management. Moreover, it is hard-wired to public cloud (if serverless in operation). Providers like AWS are becoming a one-stop shop for IT. Period.</td>
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<td><strong>THREATS</strong></td>
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<td>Most organizations have stitched a form of management platform together, often using existing or old-style processes and scripts, and their initial cloud deployments are usually small, Accenture finds. Moving to much broader-scale multi-cloud deployments requires a different approach because traditional IT policies, processes and tribal knowledge don’t support automation or agile operations models. IT operations and cloud operations are very different things as Accenture is learning, while educating and transforming customers is proving to be key to successful deployments.</td>
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