

What's your Verdict?

Migrating to AWS: Can you scale and not fail?

Practical insights from IT leaders about migrating to Amazon Web Services (AWS)

As much as Enterprise IT leaders say they want to migrate applications (or more of their applications) to AWS, they also express concerns over issues such as: What workloads should I migrate? How do I gain the commitment of application owners? How do I deal with data silos? Which processes and tools should I use?

These were some of the questions discussed at a recent roundtable with Enterprise IT leaders from transport, public sector, financial services, manufacturing, retail and energy. Leading the discussion was Mario Thomas, the EMEA Speciality Practice Lead for Migrations at AWS. Mario works with customers migrating their large-scale (5000+ servers) legacy on-premise or co-located workloads to AWS.

What was the verdict on migrating to AWS? Read on to find out.

“ Customers start out on a migration journey for all kinds of reasons... from new leadership or strategy, to issues with latency or a business restructure. Whatever the reason, understanding the desired goals is crucial to mapping out the right migration journey. ”

Mario Thomas, AWS

The IT leaders acknowledged that with the right insight, strategy and planning migrating to AWS could be a platform for limitless growth and agility for even the biggest enterprise. But as with any large-scale, transformative project, questions and concerns can hinder progress and business buy-in (or lack of), putting the brakes on it.

So how do you make sure AWS migration projects scale and don't fail?

A morning of debate gave the guidance: a less daunting, bite-sized approach to migration to help gain that all-important learning, confidence and buy-in from the top and the whole business. One leader gave the example where he used the website as a starting point for migration. It was vital to the business, had a single owner to engage with and offered a good business case. The results were impressive and he said more business units now want the lower cost and greater agility benefits they see the website team enjoy.

To help achieve successful migration programmes, the group heard about the AWS 'eight core areas of consideration' methodology. Whatever stage of migration you are at, with the right thought given to each of these areas, the group agreed you can build a digestible plan for migration and pre-empt the concerns likely to arise from the business.

Looking under the bonnet, and the '6 Rs'

“Recently we completed a discovery for a customer who thought they were managing 4,000 servers in their data centre. Discovery found nearly 18,000 which came as quite the surprise. This highlighted one of the key first hurdles we find with many customers starting a migration; knowing what is running, where it is and why it's needed. An accurate CMDB or other source of truth is essential.”

Mario Thomas, AWS

The group talked about similar stories like the example highlighted by Mario. It was used to make the point that the discovery stage is vital to ensuring you really know what you have to begin with. Then once you know what workloads you have, you can make an assessment as to which to prioritise for migration, and how to migrate them.

When undertaking this assessment, Mario talked about The six Rs approach as way of grouping workloads.

8 core areas of consideration

areas of consideration

- 1 Why are you migrating?
- 2 What will the impact on your people and partners be?
- 3 What workloads are you running, and which ones should you migrate?
- 4 Which workloads will you prioritise for migration?
- 5 What's the TCO from migrating to AWS?
- 6 How long will migration take?
- 7 How much money will it save the business?
- 8 What are the benefits?

The 6 Rs Approach

the 6 Rs approach

Retain

1 legacy workloads which cannot be moved to the cloud

Retire

2 workloads that are redundant

Re-host

3 simple to move to the cloud

Re-platform

4 workloads that require high-level supporting services to move to the cloud, such as Oracle databases

Re-factoring

5 rewriting an application for the cloud

Re-architecting

6 building new cloud-ready solutions to replace hardware

From here the agreed priorities can be set around which workloads to migrate – with the re-host group the likely first place to start. And with unused workloads retired and those which cannot be moved ring-fenced, you have a clear picture of the extent of the migration at hand.

“We did a lot of planning up-front – it was a big investment for us.

And the six Rs really helped us get started...”

CTO and migration specialist, Public Sector

Calculating the TCO

“Immediately following migration you should begin a continuous cycle of cost optimisation – otherwise you’ll end up paying what the TCO said you would. Reducing your spend and freeing up resources for innovation is key. Make sure your TCO forecast only lasts as long as your first hour of AWS usage.”

Mario Thomas, AWS.

That said, every good business case requires a TCO calculation. Costs come from data migration and consultancy – but when calculating your TCO the advice was to avoid planning to rewrite every application for the cloud – this can dramatically overinflate your TCO. By migrating in bite-sized chunks, you keep your TCO in check.

The six Rs can also help you to understand how long migration will take. How much are you planning to migrate initially? How much is a simple ‘lift and shift’, and how much needs

re-architecting? And from reviewing the impact of migration on your people, you should have a good idea of skillsets and any re-training required, which will also impact your calculations.

The cost savings... going beyond migration

When calculating the cost savings of cloud migration, it’s important to focus on the long-term gain. Simply lifting and shifting alone delivers little to no savings. The cloud is an opportunity to transform your business processes and service delivery, to make applications more resilient, and to innovate.

It’s a continuously evolving project. Moving workloads to the cloud is the start. Then comes optimising those workloads, maximising the new benefits available and encouraging cultural change in the business.

With this in mind, for those who haven’t already, the advice shared by IT leaders who have started migrating, is that it’s important to start now.

“Cloud migration makes me think of the iWatch. I’m a traditionalist, I just want to glance at my wrist and see the time – nothing else. But then I worry that by the fifth edition of the iWatch, when I might finally want one, that by then I’ll be left behind. It’s the same with migrating to AWS.”

IT leader from the retail sector

“We had Oracle databases, and a mixture of skills. We made a big investment up front, in our DevOps, and bringing in AWS architects from the start. We started small, with apps that were a simple ‘lift and shift’. It paid dividends later on.”

CTO and Migration specialist, Public Sector

Verdict: Little by little

The following quote from an IT leader around the table summed up the conclusion of the group: “Start with a small project, migrating a part of the business that is desperate for speed. Then, use this project as a business case for AWS migration in other areas of the business that have not yet thought about speed... that’s how to start the conversation and grow buy-in across the business. Breaking down misguided perceptions, and gaining trust with a series of small, successful migration projects.”

There was strong agreement that AWS migration is an open-ended journey, so there’s no need to race to migrate your entire infrastructure at once.

These kind of migration projects rarely get off the ground.

Instead of mapping out a multi-million-dollar five-year strategy to move the entire business to the cloud, consider starting with a series of smaller, five to six figure projects to move the most critical applications for the business units which would benefit the most. Use these to build your business case.

The group felt the six Rs approach would highlight the migration quick wins along with those areas that must be left on-premise. The room agreed that it’s a reality that some workloads will never work in the cloud: for these a hybrid approach maybe needed.

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