

HERALD IT

First look at Microsoft releases

Software giant sees clouds in the future of many companies as a way to even out demand

UNLIKE most other vendor conferences, Microsoft's annual TechEd concentrates on the education side of things rather than marketing.

So the only keynote of last week's gathering at the Sky City Convention Centre was a celebration of local lad made good, Microsoft chief financial officer Chris Liddell, back in the country to deliver the corporate rahrah.

The rest was techies getting tips from uber-techies.

"Microsoft TechEds traditionally talk about established technologies, but for this one there are a bunch of new technologies coming they were able to talk about," says Chris Auld from Intergen, New Zealand's largest specialist Microsoft application development shop.

"There's Microsoft's Azure cloud computing platform, Office 2010 and Windows 7, which haven't been released yet, so it was exciting for many people to have a first look at them."

Auckland was the third TechEd he has presented at this year, and he typically does three or four around the world as well as other training assignments, a testament to the close links Intergen has formed with the software giant.

Microsoft often refers to Intergen



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international clients who see business benefits in being early adopters of its new technologies, either to save money or increase revenues.

It's currently building applications for several customers which will be hosted on Azure when it has its commercial launch in November.

Cloud computing involves putting applications on servers somewhere on the internet, rather than keeping processing close to home. It doesn't care where the computing is done, as long as there is sufficient bandwidth to do the business.

"Cloud computing is using a variety of different technologies made available by some other party on a utility pricing, pay-as-you-go model," says Auld.

While some New Zealand organisations may use such models internally to allocate spare data centre capacity, most cloud computing will be sourced offshore from places like Amazon,



LOCAL VIEW: Chris Liddell, Microsoft's chief financial officer, was in New Zealand as part of the TechEd conference.

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Salesforce.com or Azure, whose nearest datacentre is in Singapore.

"Virtualisation is the key to a cloud being tenable, as is scale. I would question whether anyone in New Zealand has the scale," Auld says.

"For highly scalable application hosting, you want suppliers with 100 or 1000 spare processor cores waiting round to use. New Zealand won't have data centres with tens of thousands of processors that can be spun up on demand."

He says the sort of business case which justifies moving to the cloud could involve applications with vari-

include services around the SQL Server database, its .NET development tools, SharePoint, Exchange and the Microsoft Dynamics customer management and business applications.

"It allows you to deploy on a massive scale if needed. There are no issues if thousands of servers are required."

"There are some scenarios where you may want to host portions of your ERP in the cloud and some back at your own server. For example a customer management application, where you have some sort of customer self service portal in the cloud, and the core CRM on your premises, so you can scale the portal independent of the back-end CRM."

"That means the application can withstand extreme peaks in demand, while you retain control and flexibility in the core."

Auld says all Azure development can be done on the desktop.

"I've written cloud applications while flying above the clouds to Singapore, then deployed them when I've landed," Auld says.

"You do all the functional testing in the local environment, and move to the cloud if you need to do high-end load testing."

He says because .NET Services is part of the Azure platform, developers can glue together multiple applications.

"It allows you to do elegant application to application messaging despite topographies, so through firewalls if needed."

Auld says Azure is free to authorised developers until November, so it's a good time to get in and learn how to use the cloud.

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