A BETTER WAY TO NAVIGATE THE CLOUD

By Tom Sweeney, Executive Director, Upware by Comcast Business

Comcast's online marketplace helps businesses choose, manage, and get support for their cloud-based applications

If the technology world had its version of the perfect couple, cloud computing and small businesses would likely win the title. And little wonder. Smaller enterprises typically don't have the IT budgets or staff of their larger brethren, and they don't often have time to work out the technical nitty-gritty. They want to focus on – and grow – their business. Cloud computing lets them do just that, by eliminating the effort, the hassles, and the costs of running servers and software. The technology needed to do a job – anything from backing up data to storing email – is owned and maintained by a provider. Businesses simply pay for the services they need at any given moment, easily scaling up and down, as circumstances require.

For small businesses, cloud computing means efficiency, flexibility, a whole lot fewer headaches. So it's no surprise, either, that the number of cloud providers is booming. Among these are some first-rate services – from vendors who understand what small businesses need and how to deliver it. But not every provider fits this profile, and as the roster of cloud services grows, homing in on the right one can be a difficult, time-consuming task. So, too, can managing – and when necessary, troubleshooting – different services for different functions. The result: Too many enterprises are, once again, focusing on the technology when they could be focusing on their business.

That's a scenario that Comcast Business – a leading provider of high-speed Internet – decided to do something about. "We saw how customers wanted to use cloud services but struggled with how to pick and manage them," says Kevin O'Toole, the Senior Vice President and General Manager for New Business Solutions at Comcast Business. "So we created Upware™, a new and unique marketplace for cloud services – one that helps our customers more easily, and effectively, incorporate these important new tools into their business."

> "Cloud services have radically changed the way small businesses work," says O'Toole. "And Upware radically changes the way they buy, manage, and support them," says Kevin O'Toole, Senior Vice President and General Manager for New Business Solutions at Comcast Business.

Upware, which launched in February, addresses the three main challenges small businesses have when it comes to the cloud: selecting the right service, managing it, and getting quick and effective support.

While Upware is a marketplace for cloud-based services, it is a marketplace that has been carefully curated by Comcast Business. Only best-of-breed applications – in categories, or 'aisles,' that include data backup, data security, and collaboration – will be found there. "We wanted to make sure our customers see only business-grade services, not consumer services or so-called 'freemium' applications where you are given a basic tool for free but continually solicited to buy up," says O'Toole. "We ask vendors the tough questions – about their data center certifications, their disaster planning, their customer service. And we demand certain answers, like offering business-hour live support. If a provider can't give us those answers, it doesn't get a place on Upware."

The applications customers see are the ones that passed Comcast's test – and only the ones that passed it." These include Carbonite™, DigitalSafe®, and MozyPro® for data backup; Norton™ and Websense® for data security; and Box, Soonr Workplace®, YouSendIt™, and Microsoft® (in the form of hosted Microsoft tools like Outlook and SharePoint) for collaboration.

But Upware provides more than one-stop shopping for carefully selected cloud services. It also features customer reviews, detailed product descriptions, and free trials – all of which aid small businesses with the selection process.

Managing cloud services is simplified via Upware as well. In the past, even a modest deployment of cloud applications could quickly become an administrative burden: 10 employees on 5 different services meant 50 user accounts to manage. Each time a new employee joined the company, or left
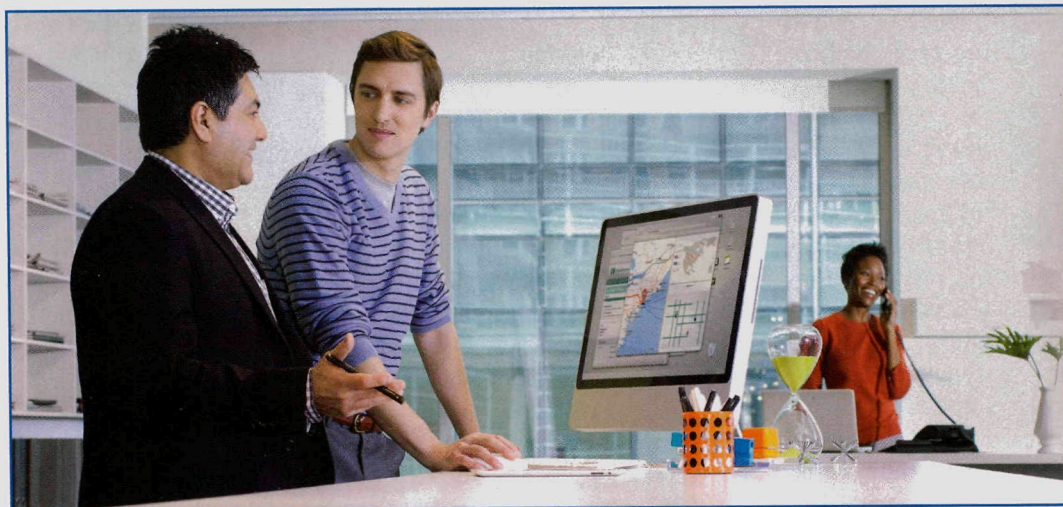

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it, numerous phone calls – and a lot of time – would be required to update everything, everywhere. With Upware, employees have a single login for all of their applications (accessed quickly through the "My Apps" tray on their screen). And administrators manage all accounts and can change permissions as needed through their Upware dashboard – a single, comprehensive view of all services and the users assigned to them. "It dramatically simplifies the process of managing employees and their access to services," says O'Toole.

Finally – and crucially – Upware enhances support. For starters, Comcast Business becomes the first point of contact for any Upware-related issue. So instead of fishing out the rolodex and hunting for the right customer support number for the right cloud service, users simply call Comcast Business, which can do a top-level diagnosis, assessing if the problem is network-related or resides deeper in the application. "You're immediately talking to someone who can see your connection and your Upware environment, and is trained to provide initial support for applications in the marketplace," says O'Toole. "If the problem requires more specialized support, we've established live transfer support to each Upware provider. So businesses can be assured that any issue they have is going to get addressed – and is going to get addressed quickly."

They can be assured, too, that this is only the beginning. As new top-tier applications come to market, they, too, could earn a place on Upware's aisles. "Cloud services have radically changed the way small businesses work," says O'Toole. "And Upware radically changes the way they buy, manage, and support them. Comcast Business customers have long seen the potential of the cloud. Now they can realize its power."

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