

ARTHUR GOLDSTUCK: More data centres spell less lockdown for cloud users

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Picture: 123RF / EVGENIY SHKOLENKO

An announcement this week that SA's biggest independent data centre provider, Teraco, would build a second facility in Cape Town came as a surprise to many.

Barely two weeks ago, Amazon Web Services switched on its first data centres in Africa in the same city. Now, Teraco is doubling its own capacity in Cape Town, adding 8,000m² of floorspace. In 2019, Microsoft set up Azure data centres in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and Huawei put down its own version in Johannesburg. Due to their size, these are known as hyperscale data centres.

The obvious question is: does our market have room for so much data centre capacity? The answer is that it's not only about capacity, but also choice, along with the unique features of each operation.

Teraco, in particular, is differentiated in that it is both about capacity and interconnections between the data centres and their tenants. According to Teraco CEO Jan Hnizdo, its offering to enterprises allows for a choice of over 250 networks providing connectivity to Africa, as well as onramps to the major international data centres.

"Enterprises can deploy their public, private and hybrid cloud strategies on Platform Teraco, which allows for complete freedom of choice from a cloud provider perspective, as well as significantly reducing the time and cost for enterprises to access these cloud platforms," he says.

It is precisely the need for this kind of approach that has allowed cloud management companies such as Veeam, VMware and Red Hat to remain competitive. All specialise in something called “hybrid cloud”, which allows companies to move seamlessly between their own “private cloud” environments, and the “public cloud”, which is accessible online with the right credentials.

Like Teraco, they act as a bridge between data centres – with the added advantage that they also manage cloud-based processes within all these data centres. Red Hat is best known as a pioneer in commercialising open source software for enterprises, and was last year acquired by IBM for \$34bn, highlighting the value created by these services.

At the Red Hat 2020 Summit at the end of April, this year a “virtual experience”, the primary theme was “bridging the future with the open hybrid cloud”. Red Hat CEO Paul Cormier put it simply: organisations that either stick only to their own corporate data centres or go all-in on public cloud are recipes for disaster.

Werner Knoblich, senior vice-president and GM for Red Hat across Europe, Middle East and Africa, told Business Times: “It’s very clear that customers will go to multiple public clouds and not just one. The kind of the strategy we laid out over the years is endorsed by every single customer. The only difference will be how much is on-premises, how much is off-premises, how much is in AWS, how much will be Azure, and so on. But the world is hybrid and multi-cloud.”

This means that the opening of new data centres in SA represents opportunity rather than competition.

“Now we will help SA customers obtain all the benefits from these hyperscalars without having the risk of being locked in, or not being able to port applications from left to right or right to left,” Knoblich said.

“There are reasons people choose Google in one scenario and Azure or Amazon in a different scenario. It’s not always price, it’s often also the capabilities and the services they provide for certain use cases. Customers can choose the best cloud provider from a technical perspective, because not everybody is best in everything.

“Our platforms provide the capabilities to live in this hybrid, multicloud world without being locked in. That’s why it will help us further accelerate in SA.”

• *Goldstuck is founder of World Wide Worx and editor-in-chief of Gadget.co.za*