



## EXPERT OPINION:

## Service providers' value added role for mobile cloud computing

In a few short years, cloud computing has progressed from marketing hype to a firmly entrenched strategic technology in businesses around the world. However, when it comes to mobile cloud computing, the full potential is yet to be exploited, writes Michael Crossey.



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Cloud computing has carved a path for new business models and transformed the way companies are run, services are provided and customers are served. Now, cloud computing has attracted the attention of the mobile industry, with companies like Google promoting a form of mobile cloud computing where applications running in the cloud are accessed from a thin handset client or even a browser, providing virtually unlimited processing power, huge amounts of storage and the promise of cross-device platform compatibility.

However, this definition of mobile cloud computing is very limiting, particularly for mobile operators, as it does not use the powerful assets of the mobile network itself. What's more, with initiatives such as the GSM Association's OneAPI and the Wholesale Application Community (WAC), the mobile industry is beginning to align itself to fully exploit the potential of mobile cloud computing.

The true value of mobile cloud computing lies in extending the principles of cloud computing – such as on-demand access, pay-as-you-go, everything-as-a-service and device-agnostic applications – to the mobile domain, so that the mobile operator's valuable assets can be fully exploited and monetised. These assets, such as reliable communications, billing relationships and customer intelligence, can be used by third parties, such as enterprises and app developers, to improve their customers' experience and differentiate their own service offerings..

The real power of mobile cloud computing is perhaps best illustrated by an example. Enterprise collaboration solutions such as Microsoft SharePoint, IBM's Lotus Live suite, and Chatter from Salesforce.com, all aim to make it easier for employees to collaborate, whether they are producing a document, managing project tasks or simply wishing to communicate in real time as a group.

Such enterprise collaboration solutions are prime candidates for mobile network-enablement via the mobile cloud. At this point, it's important to

be clear about the distinction between 'mobile enablement' – rendering an existing application for use on a mobile device – and 'mobile network-enablement' – embedding on-demand mobile capabilities into a web/desktop-based or mobile device-based application to increase its utility. This combination of a cloud-based enterprise collaboration service being augmented with mobile cloud-based network enablers creates additional value that goes well beyond the simple act of making an existing application portable.

So, you could think of a cloud collaboration service such as Chatter being augmented with network-derived location and presence information, allowing members of a group to see each other's real-time whereabouts and current status and making decisions on the best way to interact with each other based on this information. Then, using the messaging and call control capabilities of the mobile network, set up an instant or scheduled group call without the hassle of booking a conference bridge and distributing dial-in details and passcodes. All of this is possible by extending the service using simple-to-use APIs, provided either by mobile operators or cross-network mobile cloud providers.

What's particularly interesting is that as well as individual apps companies, existing cloud providers that specialise in different vertical industry segments are looking to add mobile capabilities to the mix of on-demand services they currently offer.

Mobile cloud computing has the potential to deliver significant value across the entire mobile ecosystem, not just to the Over-The-Top providers of mobile cloud-based applications. Operators can monetise their network assets and extend their reach into previously untapped market segments; mobile cloud providers can offer new, differentiated services to their clients; and app developers or enterprise solution providers can easily mobile-enable existing applications while reaching and billing customers seamlessly across multiple operator networks.

