



HEADING INTO THE CLOUD



Roel van Geffen, *ICT Business Development Manager*



Companies currently expect their IT departments to constantly develop new and better (online) products and services and to do it more quickly than ever before. And they expect them to do this with unchanged or shrinking budgets, despite the investments required in new know-how and skills, such as Big Data analysis. It's no surprise then that more and more companies are outsourcing this part of their business and migrating to the Cloud, often using a pay-per-use or fixed price model. This enables them to both cut costs and farm out non-core tasks, which can make a real business difference in their organisation.

ICT has a great deal of practical experience in the area of Cloud migrations and a number of its clients are already using its Cloud Managed Services. So when Dutch postal operator PostNL decided to migrate its entire IT environment to the Cloud, ICT was the logical choice for a large part of the migration, says PostNL project manager John Geluk. "We'd been working with ICT for a number of years and they had already developed numerous applications for us. ICT had also invested heavily in building up expertise in Cloud architecture, migration and management of application environments. Given that we also wanted a partner to assume responsibility for the management of the

cloud-based environment after migration, we also needed to work with a partner we knew we could trust."

ICT's Cloudlane is a package of cloud-based services, but it also encapsulates ICT's vision of what the Cloud can be today and in the future, says ICT Business Development Manager Roel van Geffen. "It serves as a guide for taking a client from an on-premises IT landscape to a Cloud-hosted landscape, and doing that the right way for each individual client. It helps us to ask the right questions, so we can meet very specific needs."

Given the sheer complexity of PostNL's IT environment and the number of applications, migrating the entire .NET environment required a great deal of close collaboration between PostNL and ICT during the migration process. "We have a lot of applications, developed for us by ICT and other providers. And those applications are all part of a larger chain of applications, so integrating all of those into the new system and making sure everything still works smoothly meant we had to work very closely with ICT," Geluk says.

A large part of the migration was adapting current (legacy) software and application coding to make it suitable for the new Cloud environment, most of which ICT did by itself. The challenge was then to actually move the adapted software to the new environment and testing. "We selected an application to a proof of concept. That was the first step to going full cloud within ICT, and we learnt a lot on that particular project. Most importantly, that it worked. We were cutting costs and we had few to no incidents running applications in the Cloud. Then we defined a larger project to transform all the applications that ICT built for us and move them to the cloud. And that project went very, very well."

Cloudlane is about a lot more than simply saving money, Van Geffen adds. Of course it cuts costs, but it also allows you to shift financial resources from capital expenditures to operational expenses, giving you more resources where it matters, in your core business. "It also speeds up your time to market for new products and services, because your infrastructure is already up and running. And you can scale up and down very easily and very quickly. So if you have peak periods or sudden runs it gives you a lot of flexibility," Van Geffen says.

Of course, one of the biggest challenges of the project was that PostNL had to be fully operational during the whole migration. "Yes, we still had a business to run while we were making functional adjustments to applications, so we had to manage that very precisely and very carefully. And of course these applications don't run in isolation. As soon as we cut them over, a lot of other applications have to be made aware of that. So we had to arrange for a couple of changes in other applications as well, and involved some very close collaboration between ICT and the PostNL team," Geluk says.

What ICT offers its Cloud clients is a lot more than a simple migration. It is an opportunity to redefine your business model, making it more scalable and flexible and more cost effective. What it does in fact is lower the total cost of ownership of your IT environment. Everything is there when you need to use it, but you only pay *when you use it*.

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This ability and willingness to think on a strategic level and look beyond the current situation to potential future developments is a key factor in PostNL's choice of IT partners, Geluk says. And now that all the applications that ICT developed for the company have been successfully migrated, PostNL is talking to ICT about migrating other legacy applications to the Cloud. "We really focus on partnership in projects like this. And we only work with companies we can trust. Part of that trust comes from the long-term relationships we have with our IT partners, plus their track record and their willingness to collaborate with us. And like all good partners, ICT thinks along with us and challenges us," Geluk says.

That is exactly what providing long-term solutions is all about, Van Geffen says. Cloudlane is more than a simple product. It can also serve as an enabler and a platform for future PostNL products and services. "Say a PostNL customer doesn't want to receive paper mail any more. So they want PostNL to scan that mail and send it to them in a digital format. Or they want to send PostNL all their own mail in digital format and have PostNL print that and send it to their clients. We can add that kind of capability with Cloudlane. In a sense, we provide our clients with a certain level of future-proofing, by helping them to add new products to meet their client's ever-changing needs or demands. The possibilities are virtually endless," van Geffen says.

