

SigmaUptime

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4 Collaboration through the Cloud

With the new Cloud Collaboration Services Suite, Sigma is making it easy for customers to access enterprise-class unified communications, high-definition videoconferencing and contact center technologies for a predictable monthly fee. This delivery model gives customers reliable and secure access to the tools they need, while also reducing capital expenses.

8 Software-Defined Storage

Software-defined storage (SDS) is emerging as a potential game-changer for the modern data center. SDS promises to significantly improve the efficiency of the data storage infrastructure by creating a shared storage pool that is controlled, provisioned and orchestrated via an independent software stack for high levels of automation.

10 Under Pressure

A new survey reveals high levels of workplace stress among IT professionals. Experts say automating mundane and time-intensive operational tasks or shifting them to managed services providers will ease the pressure and benefit the wider business.



Sigma Uptime

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Collaboration through the Cloud

Sigma's new solution suite makes it easy to access enterprise-class communication systems.

In the post-PC workplace, people require freedom of choice about how and where they work — which means having anytime/anywhere access to applications that improve productivity, collaboration and customer service. Unfortunately, hosting, integrating and managing these applications can introduce significant architectural and operational complexities into the IT environment.

These complexities create additional burdens for IT staffs that already have an incredible amount of responsibility. Today's demands are so great that nearly 80 percent of IT administrators in the U.S. say they have considered leaving their jobs due to job-related stress, according to a recent study from GFI Software.

Sigma Solutions can relieve some of that stress with its new Cloud Collaboration Services Suite, powered by Pivot Technology Services, a smart alternative to the resource-intensive requirements of on-premises solutions. Leveraging cloud-based architectural efficiencies, Sigma delivers enterprise-class unified communications, high-definition videoconferencing and contact center technologies for a predictable monthly fee.

“Customers can access these services quickly without the cost and complexity of evaluating, purchasing, implementing and maintaining new

technologies in-house,” said Rick Eddings, VP, Technology Services. “Because Sigma takes responsibility for managing, maintaining, upgrading, supporting and securing these applications, our customers can allocate their IT resources for innovation and business-enabling initiatives.

“Cloud-based solutions are inherently flexible, allowing customers to scale solutions up or down according to business needs. There's also less risk — if needs change or the functionality does not deliver the expected value, customers can turn off the service without losing a significant upfront investment.”

Unified Communications

By blending telephony, voicemail, instant messaging, videoconferencing and presence into a single platform, unified communications (UC) has helped organizations boost productivity-enhancing collaboration by improving access to people, data and services. The migration of UC applications and services to the cloud allows organizations to realize all those benefits through a far more cost-effective and management-efficient delivery model.

More than half of all medium and large organizations in North America will be running some of their UC applications over a private or public

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cloud service by 2016, according to a recent survey by Infonetics Research. In many cases, organizations plan to take advantage of UC-as-a-Service (UCaaS) in order to eliminate a variety of fragmented on-premises communication modes.

“Businesses continue to migrate their unified communications applications to the cloud, citing flexibility as the key reason,” said Infonetics Principal Analyst Diane Myers. “Cloud solutions are inherently more flexible than premises-based solutions, offering businesses the ability to scale users up and down, centralize management and deploy new features and applications quickly.”

Sigma’s UCaaS service also delivers a high degree of device flexibility. Sigma UCaaS subscriptions can accommodate users that need basic functionality or give a single business user access to the referenced functions on up to 10 different endpoints. This gives users the collaboration tools they need while the organization pays only for what is used.

Video as a Service

Videoconferencing is increasingly considered an essential element of UC. In the Infonetics survey, 93 percent of respondents said they are looking to implement videoconferencing solutions into their UC platforms by 2016. Sigma understands how high-definition business video, also known as TelePresence, can improve organizational efficiency.

“By integrating video into the workflow process, TelePresence has the potential to change the communications paradigm just as email and instant messaging have,” said Eddings. “Collaboration moves away from the scheduled, conference room environment to the unscheduled desktop environment. When face-to-face interaction with clients is needed, TelePresence can provide that personal touch without the need for costly and time-consuming business travel.”

Sigma’s TelePresence as a Service (TPaaS) offering makes it easier to connect and collaborate with colleagues, partners and customers from any location, whether that’s the work office, the home office, a hotel room or a coffee shop. What’s more, it delivers a “better than being there” experience with reliable, high-quality, interoperable video.

With Sigma TPaaS, users can access HD business video capabilities from any existing Cisco, Polycom, LifeSize or other SIP- and H.323-compliant video endpoints. Subscriptions cover all use cases, from desktops and mobile devices to conference rooms and external connections. This multipoint functionality allows three or more parties to dial into a secure “rendezvous room,” which can be a dedicated or shared virtual meeting room.

Cloud-based Contact Center

The contact center is the focal point for customer communication in many organizations, and thus a critical factor

in optimizing the customer experience. That experience has evolved into a complex interplay of communications channels, with customers choosing to engage via email, text, chat and social applications, as well as by phone.

According to research firm Frost and Sullivan, the cloud-based Contact-Center-as-a-Service (CCaaS) market is growing at almost twice the rate of premises-based contact center systems as organizations seek to upgrade or replace aging platforms. Not surprisingly, cost factors — including the elimination of significant capital expenditures — have contributed to this growth. Instead of purchasing, configuring, deploying and managing an on-premises solution, those costs and responsibilities are assumed by the service provider.

Beyond the cost advantages of a cloud-based model, CCaaS delivers significant strategic advantages. For example, the simple setup of new agents and supervisors in any location makes it easy to scale up or down to manage peak or seasonal demands. CCaaS also supports business continuity and remote-agent strategies. A cloud-based solution can also be easier to administer than an on-premises solution because interfaces tend to be unified across different product modules.

Sigma’s CCaaS also provides a variety of operational features, including robust monitoring and recording tools to track performance and ensure quality, text-to-speech functionality in various dialects, and speech analytics that can add insight into customer interactions.

Delivering Business Value

As cloud technologies have evolved and matured over the past several years, IT organizations are increasingly leveraging these platforms to quickly deploy new solutions that boost productivity and enhance innovation. The ability to shift capital costs and efforts related to the acquisition, installation, maintenance, upgrade and support of technologies to a third-party provider creates a powerful incentive. However, compelling operational and strategic benefits ultimately deliver the real business value.

“Over the past few years, we’ve seen a big shift in the technologies that people want to use at work,” said Eddings. “The cloud offers a delivery model that allows us to give our customers reliable and secure access to the tools they need today. Our Cloud Collaboration Services Suite provides the essential communications tools they need, tightly integrated and delivered in a way that allows them to conserve capital and resources while boosting productivity and collaboration. That’s what the cloud is all about.”

Contact Center as a Service boosts service and efficiency while reducing capital costs.

The contact center is the focal point for customer interactions in many organizations, and thus a critical factor in optimizing the customer experience. That experience has evolved from a simple phone call to a complex interplay of communications channels.

Sigma Solutions' Contact Center as a Service can help simplify the contact center experience and improve customer satisfaction. Powered by Pivot Technology Services, this cloud-based solution expedites communication and ensures that customer issues are addressed quickly and accurately on any channel.

Our platform also helps customers contain their contact center investments by avoiding the cost and disruption of hardware upgrades with a pay-per-use model that scales up or down on demand.

Contact us to learn more.



Software-Defined Storage

Decoupling the storage application from hardware creates a fast, flexible platform for managing data growth.

Enterprises have embraced the “big data” era and are actively seeking the ability to mine growing data volumes for business insights. Predictive analytics tools allow them to evaluate large amounts of structured and unstructured data in search of patterns that can help drive the decision-making process.

To fully harness these capabilities, enterprises need a storage infrastructure that can adapt elastically to changing workloads and deliver near-instantaneous access to resources. They need an alternative to the traditional hardware-centric approach to meet capacity growth, application demands and cloud deployments.

Software-defined storage (SDS) is emerging as a potential game-changer for the modern data center. SDS refers to a storage platform in which capacity is pooled on commodity hardware and controlled, provisioned and orchestrated via an independent software stack for high levels of automation.

Industry analyst firm Gartner predicts that by 2020, between 70 percent and 80 percent of unstructured data will be held on lower-cost storage managed by SDS environments. Additionally, the firm says as much as 70 percent of existing storage array products will also be available in “software only” versions by then.

Standalone Software

Still, there is considerable confusion about the technology. After all, data storage infrastructures have always



used software to administer hardware — so what makes SDS different?

While it is true that traditional storage systems have always derived much of their functionality from software, they also needed an application-specific integrated circuit, a specialized CPU or a controller to perform some of their storage functions. In SDS, the software stack is completely decoupled from the hardware. Any storage software can be installed on commodity, off-the-shelf hardware.

SDS is also frequently confused with storage virtualization, but there are significant differences. While storage virtualization aggregates the capacity of multiple devices or arrays into a single pool of storage, SDS goes much further. In SDS, the actual storage management programming is separated from the hardware, allowing IT to centrally administer storage services — provision-

ing, orchestration, change management, monitoring, reporting, de-duplication, I/O optimization and more — for the entire storage infrastructure.

This central control promises to significantly improve the efficiency of the data storage infrastructure by creating a shared storage pool that is controlled and automated through a single interface. Changes are made in the common software layer rather than in multiple individual storage devices, greatly reducing repetitive administrative functions. Centralized management will also make it easier to balance workloads to avoid performance degradations and outages.

Dynamic and Agile

Sophisticated orchestration capabilities provide IT with the flexibility and agility to automatically provision storage according to current workloads

for the entire storage pool. SDS requires no tuning or configuration, allowing administrators to dynamically add storage capacity in minutes rather than the months it takes today to configure and implement storage hardware systems. As a result, SDS enables organizations to better utilize storage resources in a simplified, efficient and scalable infrastructure while reducing hardware costs and increasing storage capacity.

The software layer can also help provide business continuity for all committed data in the event of a disaster, compared to the risk of losing 15 minutes of data or more with traditional storage software. Both speed and data protection are essential to organizations in data-driven industries such as financial services, healthcare, retail and telecommunications as they seek to deploy new workloads.

The ability to leverage new storage solutions while continuing to utilize existing infrastructure also sets SDS apart. Freed from proprietary operating sys-

tems and interfaces, organizations can use open APIs to aggregate storage from existing and new storage arrays, while also federating storage from many underlying resources — including disk, tape, flash and cloud-based platforms. This facilitates a scale-out architecture with practically limitless virtual capacity, regardless of location or device.

Because the SDS controller is compatible with any vendor's hardware, organizations avoid being locked in to a single vendor and can utilize less expensive commodity hardware without sacrificing performance. It also provides IT with a holistic view of the entire storage environment, making it easier to proactively forecast, plan and budget for future storage needs without over-provisioning.

Worth Watching

As the amount of data being produced grows each day and IT infrastructures become more complex, it is becoming clear that traditional storage

methods are unsustainable. A new approach is necessary to not only store this data, but to secure, find and access the data in order to extract business value from it. Although SDS is still an emerging market lacking clear definition, it bears watching. With the potential to reduce hardware costs, expand capacity, optimize performance and centralize management, software-defined storage offers a compelling proposition for organizations looking to drive growth through data-driven decisions.

“Software-based storage will slowly but surely become a dominant part of every data center, either as a component of a software-defined data center or simply as a means to store data more efficiently and cost-effectively,” said Ashish Nadkarni, Research Director for IDC's Storage Systems and Software market research practice. “With a consistent and coherent set of definitions, suppliers can collectively help buyers realize the vision for SDS platforms.”

OpenStack Puts SDS in the Cloud

Storage cost is compelling most organizations to at least consider a cloud storage option. Some industry studies claim that once all the costs are included, in-house storage is at least five times more expensive to own and run per gigabyte than cloud storage.

With a significant amount of enterprise data likely to move out of the data center and into off-premises clouds in the coming years, analyst firm NeuraLytx says it is becoming increasingly critical for software-defined storage (SDS) platforms to integrate off-premises capacity. The firm predicts that within two years, all SDS solutions will need to manage both on-premises and cloud-based capacity as a unified data storage architecture.

One way organizations are accomplishing this now is through the use of OpenStack, an open-source cloud soft-

ware platform. OpenStack provides a set of software tools for building and managing public and private clouds.

OpenStack's block storage option, Cinder, supports SDS services in private, hybrid and public clouds — but only those built with OpenStack. OpenStack Swift offers more flexibility for object storage options with its own application programming interface (API) as well as support for the Amazon Simple Storage Service API. OpenStack's recently developed Manila file-share service works with NetApp, Red Hat and IBM storage and supports SDS for OpenStack clouds.

“As a leader in the Manila community project, we recognized early on the value of an open, software-defined storage shared file system service for OpenStack,” said Ranga Rangachari, vice president and general manager, Red Hat Storage. “IT professionals acknowledge open, software-defined storage as a good fit for cloud.”



UNDER PRESSURE

*IT stress levels are on the rise,
according to new survey.*

High workplace stress levels for IT professionals are dramatically impacting both employees and employers, according to a new study. GFI Software's fourth annual IT stress survey finds that 78 percent of those surveyed say they are experiencing workplace stress, while 82 percent say they are actively considering a job change due to workplace stress and dissatisfaction with working conditions.

Additionally, IT professionals report they commonly put in unpaid overtime, often lose sleep, and regularly miss out on social and family functions as they attempt to deal with growing workloads. Many report feeling in poor physical condition due to work demands.

"Even in an industry like IT that's well known for being extremely stressful and highly demanding of its workforce, the findings of this year's IT Stress Survey makes for worrying reading," said Sergio Galindo, general manager of GFI Software. "The 2015 survey results clearly show a substantial deterioration of the work/life balance and job satisfaction among the U.S. IT workforce — quite concerning at a time when the IT sector is playing such a pivotal role in the growth of our economy."

Unreasonable Demands

For the second consecutive year, “unreasonable demands from management” was the most-cited contributing factor to workplace stress, although it was down considerably — from 36 percent in 2014 to 28 percent this year. User-related demands were cited by 23 percent, up from 16 percent in 2014. Budget limitations as a source of stress has remained consistent over the four years of the study, with approximately 16 percent of respondents citing this factor each year.

Survey results showed a rise in the number of respondents reporting that a relationship or friendship had failed or been severely damaged due to work commitments intruding on personal life. More than 25 percent experienced this in the last year — a new high in the four years of the survey, and up from 23 percent in 2014.

Nearly half (45 percent) reported missing social functions due to overrunning issues and tight deadlines at work, up from 38 percent in 2014. A further 40 percent also report missing time with their children due to work demands imposing on their personal time.

Business Impact

Along with the rise in stress and worker unhappiness, this year’s survey revealed a continuing high amount of unpaid overtime required by IT staff to meet deadlines and deployments. Almost 48 percent report working up to eight unpaid hours of overtime a week, while 47 percent report working more than eight hours of unpaid overtime every week.

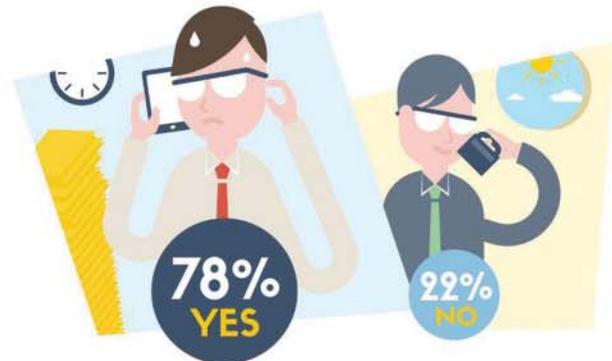
Opinion Matters, an independent insight agency, conducted the blind study by polling 410 IT professionals from the U.K. and U.S. Workers in the U.K. reported somewhat higher levels of stress, with 88 percent reporting they are stressed and 90 percent saying they are looking for a new job.

Steps to ease the pressure on IT pros will benefit the wider business, Galindo said. These steps include establishing realistic IT budgets and staffing headcounts, as well as automating mundane and time-intensive tasks such as resetting passwords, patching computers and servers and looking for network vulnerabilities.

“Smart employers understand that an overstressed and unhappy workforce means less productivity,” he said. “The higher levels of illness, mistakes and staff turnover directly related to stress can significantly impact the bottom line. Investing in worker happiness and in systems to simplify the job of the IT department is often far cheaper than replacing over-stressed or unhappy staff.”



IS YOUR JOB AS AN IT ADMINISTRATOR STRESSFUL?



WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST SOURCE OF STRESS?



HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED SWITCHING CAREERS BECAUSE OF ON-THE-JOB STRESS?



Source:
The research for GFI Software was carried out between:
11 / 03 / 2015 and 16 / 03 / 2015.
Sample: 205 IT administrators in companies of 10+ employees in the US



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