

SMBs show interest in Cloud computing

By **TIMOTHY SEOW**

DESPITE the media blitz surrounding it, Cloud computing is still something that most Singapore SMBs (small and medium-sized businesses) are a bit wary about, even though it could drastically reduce their IT costs.

However, at least two local SMBs present at the Cloudforce 2 conference last week told *BizIT* that they are looking to adopt Cloud computing in a big way. At the conference, which was attended by more than 3,000 delegates, Salesforce.com's chairman and CEO, Marc Benioff, made a presentation on his company's vision on Cloud computing where he explained what he called "Cloud 2".

He said: "Cloud 2" can be encapsulated by asking "Why isn't all enterprise software like Facebook", whereas someone talking about "Cloud 1" would ask, "Why isn't all enterprise software like Amazon.com?"

Jason Chin, chief strategy officer of the homegrown Helutrans Group, feels that while SMB's might fear the loss of control over data if they were to shift to Cloud computing, the opposite might actually be true when it comes to security concerns.

"We realised that for typical SMB networks, the kind of security and implementations we have is really not that secure. So today if we run our own Intranet application, and house it in our office, that could potentially be less secure than the infrastructure that Salesforce has," Mr Chin said.

"The pay-as-you-use framework is also a beautiful fit for SMBs, and IT fixed assets is something we are very certain is a depreciating asset. It also allows to scale very well," he added.

Helutrans Group is a transportation company that specialises in moving Fine Art pieces across the world. They are one of the more than than 50 Salesforce.com customers in Asia-Pacific to take part of the company's private beta program for their latest product addition, Chatter.

The Chatter introduction formed a significant part of Mr Benioff's speech last week. Chatter is largely

modelled on the concept of Facebook, and was heralded by Mr Benioff as a harbinger of Cloud 2.

Chatter essentially provides employees using the service with profiles, status updates and real-time feeds of business operations.

"Chatter really creates awareness in the organisation - there are things you know are going on but you don't have time to concentrate fully on it," said Mr Chin. "When things get updated you get kept in the loop, without someone having to write you a report or to send you an e-mail."

And Helutrans Group is not the only one pleased with Salesforce.com.

Security firm Ademco - also a homegrown SMB - has been using Sales-

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force.com to streamline its sales process across the region, as well as allow it obtain customer feedback, managing director Toby Koh said.

"One of the biggest advantages is mobility - for example, our engineers, whether in Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, go to the customers site, get a connection, and they are on the system."

"When the service maintenance is done, the engineers key the report straight into the system, the customer does a digital signature, and the service reports goes out via email to the client."

"Every client who gets the e-mail gets a hyperlink for a customer satisfaction survey, so we get instantaneous feedback on whether we've done a good job."