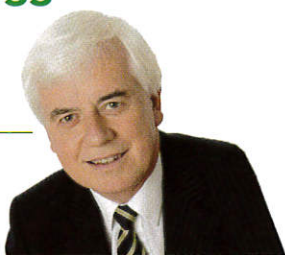


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CLOUDBURST OVER INDUSTRY SHOWCASE IN LOS ANGELES

During July, Los Angeles experienced the annual Microsoft Worldwide Partner Conference. More than 15,000 partners from the global certified partner community attended what was one of the most impressive business technology showcases to date. The central theme was cloud computing and how it is going to alter the future IT landscape.

What became clear is that a paradigm shift is taking place which will change the way in which information is consumed by end users. This will have a dramatic impact on how technology will be supplied in future. One of the key themes was the changing practices in the workplace due to the influence of technology in social scenarios. Electronic devices such as smartphones mean that people are often engaged in work practices during leisure time.

On the ERP front, it was announced that Microsoft Dynamics NAV would be the first ERP product in the range to be launched as a cloud offering. The global software giant is keen to use this mid-range product to extend its lead in the sector by offering it as a subscription service. However, the partner message was that the market offering had to be vertically focused. The cloud version will be launched during the first half of 2012.

It was said that Microsoft had lost the phone market to players like Apple with the iPhone. I doubt it will be for long once the new features shown (codenamed Mango) are released. They include all contacts in one place, linked emails, voice to text recognition, seamless links to the Bing search engine, email translation services and integration with Office 365. Little wonder that leading mobile phone vendor Nokia have made a major commitment to the platform. Industry analyst Gartner predicts the Microsoft phone platform will take the number-two position by 2015.

Apparently the take-up of Office in the cloud, called Office 365, has been quite a success. This allows all users access to the latest Office technology on a subscription basis. Everything possible has been bundled into the product to increase user satisfaction. This will be very attractive to companies fed up with trying to keep their office systems current. In the meantime, the launch of the cloud version of Microsoft Dynamics CRM has posed a serious threat to market leader *Salesforce.com*.

The 2011 worldwide partner conference flagged the significant sea change now happening in the IT sector. It is evident that cloud computing is the catalyst for that change. The new paradigm represents both a threat and opportunity to the sector. What can be expected are further waves of consolidation as industry players see the writing on the wall for outdated products and delivery models. ■

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