

UniSIM opts for the cloud to save costs

The university says all its 11,000 students and about 200 full-time faculty and staff can access the cloud service, reports **RAJU CHELLAM**

FOLLOWING on the heels of the Ministry of Education's (MOE) move to put 30,000 teachers in 350 public schools on a Google cloud, Singapore's largest private tertiary institution – SIM University (UniSIM) – is also taking bold steps to put its archival data on a public cloud.

UniSIM has opted for a cloud-based service called StaaS (Storage as a Service) and found that it cuts costs by a factor of 20.

"If we had decided to buy all the infocomm sources ourselves, it would have cost us about \$146,400," says Gary Teo, director of UniSIM's campus IT services. "By opting for a StaaS model, our total cost was only \$7,200. That's 20 times lower than if we had done it all ourselves."

The university, which specialises in an open-style university education for adult learners, currently has 11,000 students, 800 staff and 10,500 alumni. All the students and about 200 full-time faculty and staff can access the cloud service.

UniSIM offers 40 academic programmes in four schools: School of Arts & Social Sciences, School of Science & Technology, School of Business, and School of Human Development and Social Services.

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Cloud costings			
Cost comparison between in-house and cloud based models			
COST COMPONENTS	BUY OWN RESOURCES (S\$)	BUY GRID SERVICES (S\$)	REMARKS
Hardware	12,000	–	Purchase of two servers + operating system + maintenance
Software	70,000	–	Purchase of software
Storage	14,000	–	Storage & maintenance fee
Co-location & power	7,200	–	Co-location & power cost for two servers
Technical support	43,200	–	Manpower for technical setup + support
Grid services (StaaS)	–	7,200	Storage + Singaren shared bandwidth
Total	146,400	7,200	Savings of \$139,200

Source: National Grid Office + UniSIM + PTC System

'Currently, course material is not available on the grid, but UniSIM is planning to make it available in the next few years.'

– Gary Teo, director of UniSIM's campus IT services

grid, but UniSIM is planning to make it available in the next few years," Mr Teo said. "Apart from increased efficiency and cost effectiveness, data security is our key priority. All data is encrypted at source before it is stored in the grid."

For the StaaS initiative, the university has chosen to partner a homegrown company called PTC System. The company, set up

in 1991, is one of three groups chosen by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) in late 2008 to offer services on the National Grid.

"We specialise in StaaS and had priced our service at S\$1 per gigabyte of storage per month," PTC System's managing director S S Lim had then said. "We will allocate more than 12 TB (terabytes) of storage

for the service and will scale that up over time."

In September 2009, the MOE announced its decision to leverage on Google Apps to provide email, Web 2.0 communication and collaboration tools to more than 30,000 teachers and staff in 350 public schools in Singapore. The goal was to adopt innovative technologies within the education profession to drive next-

generation learning and communications, the MOE said.

According to research house International Data Corp, the global market for StaaS is expected to cross the US\$3 billion mark by 2012, with a compound annual growth rate of 30 per cent between 2007 and 2012.

UniSIM's parent, Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) Group, has also chalked out ambitious plans to double its current campus in physical size and student enrolment. Called the SIM Campus Development Master Plan, it will cost S\$300 million and will be completed by 2014. It will offer an additional 56,000 square metres of space, more than double its current campus.

SIM Group is Singapore's largest solutions provider of higher education and professional training. It was founded in 1964 as a membership society under the Economic Development Board and now has 33,000 corporate and individual members.

SIM Group runs the SIM University (UniSIM); SIM Global Education, which offers degree programmes in partnership with established universities in Britain, Australia, Switzerland and the US; and SIM Professional Development, which trains about 11,000 professionals annually via seminars, workshops and conferences.