

Microsoft ups cloud ante in S'pore with new deals

SATS and RSVP Singapore have signed up for Microsoft's BPOS cloud service, reports **ONG BOON KIAT**

THE battle for cloud computing supremacy in Singapore is hotting up. Microsoft Corp, which is making a big push in this segment, has sealed two new deals to significantly add to its momentum in this segment. The software vendor said last Saturday that Singapore Airport Terminal Services (SATS) has adopted Microsoft's budding Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS) offering for its 9,000 employees.

It is Microsoft's largest BPOS deal to date in Singapore and one of its largest deals in Asia Pacific, according to Haresh Khoobchandani, senior director of Microsoft Singapore's business and marketing organisation.

The other deal was with RSVP Singapore, a non-profit organisation that promotes elderly volunteerism and community-based services. RSVP has deployed a component of BPOS, the Exchange Online Deskless Worker solution, across 3,000 seats to cater to its members. The organisation has also deployed 25 seats of Exchange Online for its staff.

Microsoft launched BPOS – its suite of Web-based messaging and collaboration software – in Singapore four months ago. This suite is seen as a rival to Google Inc's online software package Google Apps, and represents a new business model for Microsoft, in which software is offered through the Web as subscription-based services. BPOS is available for US\$10 per user per month. Businesses can also subscribe to individual products within the suite and pay less.

Such online software services are offered over a so-called cloud computing platform, in which applications and data are

stored in servers and data centres owned by service providers. For organisations, an important benefit of such cloud-hosted services is that they need not fork out the usual high upfront acquisition cost of hardware and software licences.

Google, which has a head start in this segment, last September scored an eye-catching deal in Singapore with the Ministry of Education. Under that deal, 30,000 teachers and staff in over 350 schools were given Google Apps, which includes the popular e-mail application Gmail.

Responding to BizIT's queries by email, Mr Khoobchandani said the SATS deal is significant for Microsoft for its sheer scale and because it is a "competitive win". It also showcases "how a large enterprise can combine the benefits of on-premise and cloud services to offer a rich desktop experience through products like Microsoft Office while offering collaboration and email services to occasional IT users and mobile workforce through the cloud".

Microsoft has signed up 13,000 seats for BPOS in the last two months, he revealed. "With over 100 partners already signed up in Singapore and the number growing, it is clear that there is already a strong momentum around BPOS and we will continue to grow this business through our partners."

And demand for Microsoft's cloud services is expected to pick up even more as the vendor rolls out its new offering Office 2010 with Office WebApps in the coming months, Mr Khoobchandani said.

Microsoft will be releasing the next version of its flagship office software, Office 2010, on May 12 for business, with broad availability of the software expected in June. It will include a free Web-based version of the software.



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