

On-demand CRM in demand

Hosted software a boon for customers with limited resources

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SOFTWARE as a service (SaaS) is all the rage, and customer relationship management (CRM) is one area that has gained popularity as an on-demand offering.

CRM SaaS vendors are ramping up their offerings on the Web, charging users based on a subscription-licensing model.

One of the earliest players in this space, Salesforce.com, launched AppExchange Mobile last month, which makes available its CRM applications on almost any mobile device.

A newer player in the field, NetSuite, launched the NetSuite Version 11.0 software – also last month – to provide mid-sized companies with greater business process customisation that goes beyond CRM functions.

Even SAP, a major player in the enterprise CRM space, has unveiled an on-demand version of its mySAP CRM solution, designed for large and mid-sized organisations.

As these CRM players dish out their latest on-demand offerings, they are also jostling to get a bigger slice of the pie in the Asia-Pacific marketplace.

According to Mr Steve Russell, Asia-Pacific president and chief executive officer of Salesforce, the company's Asia-Pacific licencing revenues grew by nearly 100 per cent last year, compared with 76 per cent globally. Salesforce has about 400,000 subscribers globally, of which Asia-Pacific accounts for about 10 per cent.

NetSuite set up its Asia-Pacific regional office in Singapore last September and has since doubled



LOGICAL PROGRESSION: CRM solutions have evolved from the mainframe platforms to costly client-based ones, to the plug-and-play on-demand offerings today.

its Asian-Pacific revenues quarter over quarter, said its president and CEO Zach Nelson.

Early movers that have strong brand equity can leverage their strong presence in the Asia-Pacific region to expand their market reach with CRM SaaS solutions, said Mr Kitcho Ing-Udomnoogoon, senior market analyst (Software Research) at International Data Corp Asia-Pacific.

However, CRM SaaS adoption in the region is still at a "very early stage", he added. Mr Ing-Udomnoogoon pointed out that vendors are putting more efforts into expanding their CRM on-demand customer base to fast-growing countries such as China and India.

"Vendors are marketing their CRM on-demand offerings selectively as they are evaluating each country's potential before investing further," observed Mr Ing-Udomnoogoon.

"The major concerns are on the confidentiality of customer information that is stored and maintained by service providers, and the quality of the services in terms of system uptime and technical support, and the flexibility in customising applications to suit customer requirements."

A BOON FOR SMES

Compared with on-premise CRM offerings, on-demand CRM does not require large hardware investments and companies can get by with less resource-intensive internal IT departments for maintenance. This

reduces the total cost of ownership, at least in the short term.

"I think it's safe to say that around the globe, when an on-premise application and an on-demand application equally meet the requirements of a business, businesses will choose the on-demand application every time because of the reduced cost and increased capabilities of a Web-based application," said Mr Nelson.

In particular, the perks of CRM SaaS could have greater appeal among resource-limited small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs).

"The sheer number of SMEs across the region and their contribution to the economy represents a huge area of potential growth for SaaS," said Mr Russell.

"Some estimates suggest that SMEs account for over 70 per cent of gross domestic product in markets such as China and India. Many SMEs don't have the resources to fund a client-server CRM application. SaaS helps SMEs by levelling the playing field."

Also, SMEs, which might be less concerned about data confidentiality but more sensitive to the acquisition costs of solutions, could feel more comfortable adopting SaaS offerings, said Mr Ing-Udomnoogoon.

"We should be able to expect impressive growth rates of revenue streams from CRM SaaS over the next few years, albeit from a very small base as this is still an emerging market in the region," he predicted.

Trial program to help govt agencies fly through files

SHARING documents online can help companies become more efficient, since employees can access information anytime. That is, if the employees can find the documents they want in the mess of folders and subfolders.

To address this problem, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) will start a six-month trial on an automatic electronic filing program, called KRIS Intelligent Filer, from this week.

Using artificial intelligence, the program organises the filing system by scanning through documents and filing those with similar content automatically under the same category.

It also remembers different users' filing patterns

to cater to each user's unique needs.

Software company SQL View spent about \$800,000 to develop the program with the help of A*Star. Up to 50 URA employees will be involved in the pilot test.

To help fund the test, SQL View will receive about \$260,000 from The Enterprise Challenge (TEC), an initiative driven by the Prime Minister's Office that helps test innovations within the public sector.

Said Ms Yeoh Chee Yan, deputy secretary of Development, Public Service Division, Prime Minister's Office: "This project has the potential to bring about substantial cost savings to the URA. If the trial works, the application could potentially be implemented by all public agencies." — TEO XUANWEI

officehelpers

PANASONIC TOUGHBOOKS CF-W4/CF-T4/CF-Y4

Designed for business users, Panasonic's latest Toughbooks – the CF-W4, CF-T4 and CF-Y4 – are as resilient as they sound.

These rugged notebooks are touted to be able to resist up to 100kg of force, even on the screen.

They can also function even after being dropped from a height of 30cm.

The Toughbooks are equipped with Intel Pentium M processor, Intel 915 Express Chipset and Intel Pro/Wireless Network Connection.

A reinforced PC card slot and a Secure Digital slot can be used to connect external hard drives and read memory cards directly.

At the same time, the models are light and boast long battery lives.

The 1.53kg CF-Y4 has a 14-inch liquid crystal display (LCD) and an internal optical drive.

Armed with 12-inch LCDs, the CF-W4 and the CF-T4 weigh 1.29kg and 1.52kg, respectively.

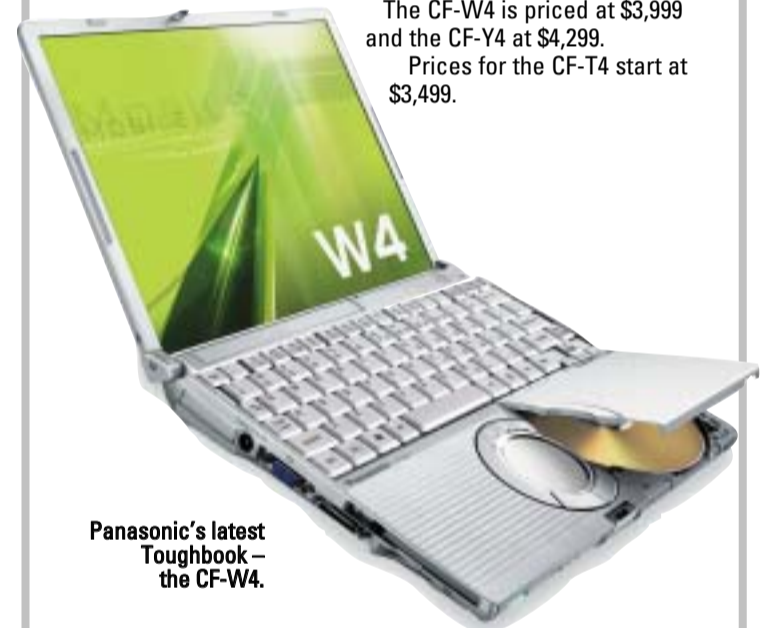
The CF-T4 has an extended battery life of up to 12 hours while the CF-W4 and CF-Y4 can operate up to 7.5 hours and

6.5 hours respectively.

The CF-W4 is priced at \$3,999

and the CF-Y4 at \$4,299.

Prices for the CF-T4 start at \$3,499.



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