CLOUD

Google has quietly launched its answer to AWS Lambda

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Above: At a Google event in San Francisco on Sept. 29, 2016.

Image Credit: Jordan Novet/VentureBeat

The Google Cloud Platform, the public cloud infrastructure from Google that developers can use to build and run their own apps, last night released a fascinating service called Google Cloud Functions. The tool, which allows developers to set up functions that get triggered in response to certain events, is notable because it's quite similar to the well-received Lambda service from public cloud market leader Amazon Web Services.

"Google Cloud Functions is a lightweight, event-based, asynchronous compute solution that allows you to create small, single-purpose functions that respond to cloud events without the need to manage a server or a runtime environment," Google explained in the documentation for the new service, which carries an Alpha label. People interested in using the service must be granted access from Google after filling out a form.

Despite its potential value, Google didn't do much to promote the launch — no blog post, no tweet.

That Google has finally delivered something — even if it's an early-access program — that offers the power and simplicity of Lambda is a sign that Google is continuing to plug the holes of some of the most exciting features available on AWS.

Also in this vein, Google last year introduced a type of content-distribution network (CDN), which AWS already offers, as well as a tool for hosting source code repositories (again, AWS already has its own).

Feature parity isn't the only type of war the Google cloud is waging. Google has also challenged AWS through price cuts.

Following some skepticism from industry spectators about Google's long-term commitment to the cloud business, Google chose VMware cofounder Diane Greene to lead all of its cloud businesses last year by acquiring her company Bebop.

Meanwhile, Microsoft Azure does not have a service to compete with Lambda — but Microsoft is developing one, as analyst Janakiram MSV noted in an article on Cloud Functions in *Forbes*.

Google Cloud Functions run as Node.js modules. As such, developers write them in good old JavaScript. These functions can be called, or triggered, when certain things happen in services like Google Cloud Storage — a new photo is uploaded to a photo-sharing app, for example — or Google Cloud Pub/Sub. The service can also work with webhooks. Generally speaking, then, the tool can speed up up development because programmers need to spend less time coming up with, deploying, and maintaining code that makes things happen under certain circumstances.
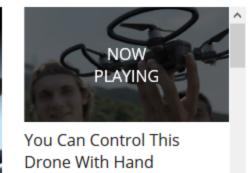
Pricing information for Cloud Functions is not available — after all, the service is still in Alpha.

Coincidentally, this morning Iron.io, a startup with a service that competes with Lambda, announced that it had raised $11.5 million in funding, with a contribution from SAP spinoff Sapphire Ventures.

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