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Brace yourself: Google joins OpenStack

Nick Chase, OpenStack:Now on July 20, 2015

In a sign that the Infrastructure as a Service landscape is changing before our eyes, Google this week announced that it had become a sponsor of the **OpenStack** Foundation. Google, which runs its own (non-OpenStack) public cloud, joined at the corporate sponsor level — membership at the Gold or Platinum level is limited and based on vacancies and board voting — and will work on continuing to integrate its open source Kubernetes container management system with OpenStack. The partnership bring significant benefits to both sides.

It's not as though Google has been absent from OpenStack before now; earlier this year the company worked with Mirantis to help integrate Kubernetes into OpenStack App Catalog (Murano), the foundation of the OpenStack Community App Catalog. Google engineers have also helped see to it that Kubernetes is the foundation for the OpenStack Container Service (Magnum), which enables users to run containers on bare metal and on virtual machines. The company's commitment to OpenStack will be expanded as it focuses on its goals in getting involved.

But what are those goals, exactly?



Google has a number of good reasons for partnering with OpenStack. Some are simple, such as getting feedback about Kubernetes in a non-Google environment. Others are related more to positioning. For example, by getting involved in OpenStack, Google can more easily ensure not only that the platform has support for containers, but that that support is implemented in a way that fits with Google's plans and roadmaps while still conforming to the community process, which seeks to avoid vendor lock-in.

More than that, however, the partnership is an acknowledgment by Google that many of the enterprise customers they are targeting are using OpenStack; the company sees the partnership as a way into some of those customers. "What used to be a plan B is now becoming much more of a plan A and therefore Google better get on board with this OpenStack thing," William Fellows, research vice president of 451 Research, [told ZDNet](#).

Google itself sees two trends merging: hybrid computing and containers, and both point towards OpenStack.

"Few enterprises can move their entire infrastructure to the public cloud," Craig McLuckie wrote in [Google's announcement blog](#). "For most, hybrid deployments will be the norm and OpenStack is emerging as a standard for the on-premises component of these deployments."

Kubernetes isn't required for hybrid deployments, of course; it's possible to move workloads between OpenStack and Google Cloud (or AWS, or VMware, or Microsoft, or ...) in a number of different ways. It's just a lot more convenient when workloads have been containerized and can be managed by a single system that can move them around more easily and seamlessly, as Kubernetes can.

At the moment Google's hybrid capabilities take a back seat not to Amazon, but to Microsoft, which currently claims the title in terms of dominance in hybrid cloud. "Since its Windows Server is already basically everywhere, the Microsoft Azure public cloud product — which has tons of Windows integrations — has a big leg up on the competition when it comes to hybrid," [BusinessInsider writes](#). "Google just made a big move that could let it leapfrog Amazon Web Services as it races with Microsoft to get its cloud computing platform into big businesses."



Amazon itself has a different view of hybrid computing; it doesn't like it. "Slowly but surely what is in the on-premises world will start disappearing," Amazon Web Services boss Werner Vogels [told NetworkWorld](#).

451 Research's Fellows disagrees. "Whereas Amazon has a very self-centred view of the world. 'You can do everything on Amazon', Google's approach is absolutely 180 degrees opposite. It fully anticipates and is planning and building and developing for a multi-cloud world. That really is going to be one of the differentiators that it's going to hang its hat on in terms of going up against AWS," Fellows said.

Ovum's lead software analyst Laurent Lachal told BCN, "Joining OpenStack is exactly that – a means to building a bridge between private and public clouds, and supporting containers within the context of OpenStack may be both a means of doing that and generating consensus around how best to support containers in OpenStack, something that could also work in its favour."

And containers, of course, are at the crux of the issue. It's a subject that's been a little touchy for OpenStack as well, as the platform tries to define where it stands in a world where it's been displaced as the "hot new technology" by Docker and containers. Increasingly, the answer has been that OpenStack is at least adding container management capabilities, if not, as [InfoWorld put it](#), "reinventing itself as a container management system".

(As a side note, there's a benefit to not being "the new kid" anymore. As [James Governor at Redmonk said](#), "From the perspective of the tech hipster it's easy to dismiss Openstack as something for old fuddy-duddies, but the thing about old fuddy-duddies is that they have budget.")

Part of the reason Google's actions matter is because of the signal that it sends regarding the future of containers in the platform. After all, the Register points out, "OpenStack's sweet spot is in big rigs and Google's expertise is operating at very large scale. Developers therefore have the prospect of a containerisation platform that can meet very stringent demands indeed."

On the other side of the coin, Google benefits from OpenStack's foothold in the enterprise market. In his announcement blog, OpenStack Foundation COO Mark Collier wrote, "I just spoke with a large enterprise



user of OpenStack this week who described OpenStack as their ‘path to production’ for containers. The value proposition for them is that OpenStack can provide a single control plane across all of their infrastructure, which will include VMware, KVM and containerized workloads.”

For its part, OpenStack also gets significant benefits out of the alliance above and beyond Google’s container expertise. In addition to its hyperscale know-how, Google brings a good bit of credibility to the initiative.

As Blue Box (and now IBM)’s Jesse Proudman wrote, “At this point, there are only two major cloud players left who are NOT backing OpenStack. One is synonymous with public cloud and is doing just fine despite GOOG’s latest cloud price cuts, thank you very much. The other is probably taking a harder look at OpenStack today than it was yesterday.

“So, can we finally put to bed all the abject silliness about whether or not OpenStack is real?”

Resources

- [4 reasons why Google joined OpenStack | InfoWorld](#)
- [Google is Positioning Kubernetes to Stand at the Center of the Hybrid World](#)
- [Google bringing container expertise to OpenStack | The OpenStack Blog](#)
- [Google Signs on as Corporate Sponsor of the OpenStack Foundation | Business Wire](#)
- [Google Cloud Platform Blog: Containers + Private Cloud. Google Sponsors OpenStack Foundation](#)
- [Google joins OpenStack Foundation to ease container management – Fortune](#)
- [Google becomes an OpenStack sponsor. What is happening in this world? | Network World](#)
- [Google Cloud: It’s the Infrastructure, Stupid. On Joining the Open Stack Foundation. – James Governor’s Monkchips](#)
- [Google Embraces Rival OpenStack Cloud Technology](#)
- [Google joins OpenStack foundation – Business Insider](#)
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