



What will the software industry look like in 3, 5, even 10 years from now?

Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions will become the standard for how the business is conducted. Rather than develop and deploy their own in-house infrastructures and systems, businesses will delegate their software needs to providers offering specialized solutions such as CRM, Accounting, Process Management, Human Resources and more.

At Centah, this is how we are going forward to help our customers-companies and contractors in the facilities maintenance, home improvement and repair and other trade sectors, as well as high-rise and low-rise builders. The days of managing your business manually, without interconnectivity, will end.

One application does not need to meet all your needs. You don't need to build the perfect suite of products in order to run your business effectively, because your needs and the products change. With SaaS you can focus on your core business and add new modules from a variety of companies to complete your order management, back office accounting, CRM and so on. Let the experts who provide the SaaS business applications focus on what they know -- and take advantage of the plethora of great solutions out there without getting stuck with particular ones forever.

Centah's focus for 2011 is to provide our customers with the best SaaS choices - options from other providers who specialize in modules that complement our products and solutions. These could be independent developers, other platforms, other SaaS companies and their modules and mobile applications. We can be a valuable sales channel for these providers. Collaborative technology is evolving quickly, and business and technology leaders need to work together in new ways.

Our channel helps our customers win. Data about suppliers and work orders that used to require customized software to manage on an in-house infrastructure will now be available on a web-based platform that is accessible, with appropriate access controls, to their entire enterprise in real-time.

That gives our customers the time, confidence and power to use it most effectively. Their data is safe and secure, and SaaS reduces or eliminates costs normally associated with in-house software solutions

As Software as a Service grows more vital to business practices over the next decade, we see our relationship with our customers as a network company growing too. Some of the trends over the next few years we're watching for:

Better use of analytics - Today, analytics to support business actions tend to look backward; businesses will be able to use this data more to project what happens next. Now that the data is more readily available and infrastructure is more scalable there is more opportunity to do better forecasting, using past business trends to look at the future. SaaS solutions work with each other. This makes it easier to integrate data from varying sources. This, in turn, allows businesses to better understand their customers, costing and their own business processes.

Expanded SaaS Management - Some companies are still not entirely comfortable with their data stored externally. Yet SaaS is the way to go. There is room for us and others to help ensure they are comfortable with the transition. The Gartner Group predicts that by 2012 larger enterprises will have their own sourcing teams responsible for ongoing cloud-sourcing decisions and management. Companies like Centah are already prepared to accommodate them, offering the right cloud technologies and best practices to run the services.

Mobility - Every year, more and more people begin using mobile computing devices such as smart phones, tablets and netbooks. This trend will require companies to make their information and business processes available on this new medium. Web-based SaaS solutions are particularly well suited for this task. Another trend is toward better understanding the context of searches and questions. This type of computing deploys information about end users and their environment, activities, connections and preferences to pinpoint the answers they need. Gartner predicts that by 2013 more than 50 per cent of Fortune 500 companies will have these kinds of context-aware initiatives and by 2016, a third of the world's mobile consumer marketing will be context based. This is important to the verified contractors on our database for reaching their customers and new business leads.

And what customer demands and business trends will drive changes in software products, how they're developed, and the industry that provides them?

The need to ensure security of information in the cloud, and to explain to customers how security is ensured, will become more important as business migrates-maybe stampedes-to cloud computing. Security can be a differentiator, separating the successful cloud company from the others.

Customers want visibility. The new breed of customer understands the vast new opportunities that the cloud provides. But they also want to retain control over their own information, to be able to transport it through their own internal systems. They are wary of who gets to look at their data and they want to make sure it is in safe hands and won't be degraded.

Cloud companies will need to tackle security on two fronts. First, they need to address the real security needs of their customers, from small and medium sized enterprises to large corporations. Secondly, they need to constantly communicate how they are keeping customers' data secure.

On the protection side, most SaaS providers already follow accepted industry security standards such as SAS 70 II or PCI-analogous to ISO designations. That ensures that businesses always have external verification of the quality of the provider they choose. PCI enforces measures, which ensure that systems are secure, and they address additional issues such as backup plans, disaster recovery and provisions for business continuity in case of a breach. A good SaaS provider will also perform daily scans of its system, to determine both robustness and to emulate-and prevent-typical attacks.

On the communication side, it's about asking and telling. It will be more important than ever to make sure new customers and clients go through their own security checklist. We can remind them that with SaaS, the data is located externally, requiring the accessing party to authenticate. This means that every access can be logged, tracked and analyzed, allowing identification of anomalies and raising of alerts in the event of suspicious activity.

We also encourage customers to ask tough questions of their prospective SaaS provider, and to ensure that their employees use good password practices when interacting with a SaaS solution.

This interview was published in SIIA's [Vision from the Top](#) , a Software Division publication released at [All About the Cloud](#) 2011.