Expert Eye: Telstra's advice for UK businesses looking to expand in Asia

Matt Williams, Head of EMEA at Telstra, discusses how UK businesses can capitalise upon the growing opportunities emerging in Asian markets by leveraging critical technologies and IT infrastructure

To say there are huge business opportunities in Asia would be an immense understatement. With a population of over 2.3 billion spread across 16 countries, it is one of the most sought-after consumer markets for global businesses. Research suggests that today, 40 percent of global economic activity now occurs in Asia, and world growth is expected to be led by the region over the next decade.

The World Economic Forum predicts that next year, in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), Asian economies will become larger than the rest of the world combined for the first time since the 19th century. With figures like these, very soon Asia will not just be the biggest global producer of goods and services – it will also be the biggest global consumer.

Understandably, Asia continues to buck the global trend for trade fragmentation. Its emergence as the world's most dynamic economic region has focused many minds on the opportunities and challenges of what we see as the Asian century. International expansion would seem to be the logical next step for many UK-based companies, but in today's increasingly digital global economy, success is based on more than just logistics and products.

Crucially, getting IT support and infrastructure right plays a crucial role for organisations. With ICT and technology getting faster and smarter, and the cloud playing an increasingly significant role in the global economy, the way tech supports business in Asia continues to change.

To navigate these challenges, there are five things UK businesses should consider on their journey into Asia.

Local country infrastructure

Whilst data may be stored in the cloud, companies need to ensure it reaches their end-users in a timely and reliable manner. Without a resilient global network that can intelligently handle latency issues and network outages, a cloud solution can be rendered useless. Bandwidth costs are another aspect to consider when comparing suppliers, as costs in Asia can be higher than in Europe.

Each country has very different technological infrastructures and capabilities, so access rights differ from country to country, and companies need to consider local regulation. For example, if a UK organisation's data is stored offshore, it could be subject to the laws of the country in which that storage facility is located, leading to scenarios such as a foreign government requesting access to stored information.

Security and data governance

Security attacks are becoming an increasingly pervasive phenomenon in Asia. A 2018 report found Asia-based companies to be twice as likely to experience multiple security incidents from multiple attackers compared to organisations in Europe or North America. Further, when an APAC business experiences a significant attack, the chance of experiencing another attack in the following year is more than 90 percent.

To mitigate these issues, UK businesses should consider adopting a cloud infrastructure platform that enables them to host data offshore safely. Cloud computing gives unprecedented access and options to businesses of all sizes, but organisations need to not only be aware of the different types of cloud, but also which is the best option to serve their individual needs.

Public cloud offers cost savings and ease of management, while private cloud focuses on flexibility, performance and security. Hybrid environments attempt to offer the best of both, but ultimately, companies must think about what types of tasks they need to accomplish daily, the software applications required and how they want to fund their technology when making the decision to invest in cloud technologies as part of their broader digital channel strategy.

Culture and language

An important component of ICT that is often ignored is the understanding of local markets at a granular level. Many businesses consider Asia as a single market entity, but the reality is that there are many different markets with vastly different ways of doing business.

To excel in these markets, businesses need to have technical expertise within each region. One important feature to consider is choosing an IT partner that is a member of the Asia Cloud Computing Association (ACCA), an organisation focused on creating awareness and understanding of the cloud market and associated capabilities in countries across

Asia. This membership is ideal because ACCA also engages with governments and regulatory bodies across the region to share insights and encourage greater consistency and transparency on policies and capabilities in each country.

Increased flexibility

Due to today's fast moving and changing business landscape, organisations need to be flexible enough to tackle any unexpected changes in the market or meet fluctuations in business demands – especially when operating in a new region. This approach does not just apply to processes but must be reflected in the agility of a company's IT infrastructure.

Thankfully, business IT scalability is an advantage to utilising cloud computing services. In addition, well-implemented capacity management processes can allow an organisation to mitigate the risks of change and growth while controlling and optimising the costs of running the IT environment.

As well as embracing the cloud, businesses should also consider measures such as configuring servers to allow for additional capacity and ensure their software is optimised for scalability

Greater collaboration and support

As businesses expand into Asia and the surrounding regions, the need for collaboration between offices across the globe is crucial in order to maintain productivity. Cloud computing helps to make the complex simple by acting as a globally consistent platform upon which applications can be built and delivered.

This means that by using the cloud, multinational customers can quickly seize new business opportunities and get projects up and running faster.

The opportunity ahead

Although each market presents unique opportunities and challenges, businesses should rest assured that they are not alone in trying to interpret and understand the challenges around localisation, regulatory, security, and accessibility. Asia presents significant opportunities for UK businesses, and success cannot be achieved by just taking a long-term approach to market entry, but by being flexible and adaptable, and leaning on the wisdom of trusted partners to ensure approaches are well informed.

To ensure expansion into Asia is a profitable venture, companies should look for advice and expertise from connectivity and technology services partners that have the experience in the market and knowledge to guide them. By taking these actions, organisations can be sure their infrastructure will be ready for the business opportunities that Asia presents.

About the expert

Matt Williams is the Head of EMEA at Telstra, based at Telstra's offices in London. He has 20 years' experience in the industry, with ten of those spent at Telstra. As businesses in EMEA look to digitally transform and access new growth markets, Williams and his team are responsible for expanding Telstra's customer growth and services within the region.