Top 10 Tips for Cloud-Based Service Automation
How to transform your software-defined data center vision into positive IT outcomes

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TOP TIPS AT-A-GLANCE

Strategic Tips

1. Consider the full spectrum of automation opportunities.
2. Use automation as a catalyst for innovation.
3. Get some quick wins.

Operational Tips

4. Assess your organization's readiness and maturity levels honestly.
5. Know your processes.
6. Don't underestimate the importance of education.

Technical Tips

7. Take an end-to-end, lifecycle approach.
8. Dig deep into the technical requirements.
9. Make sure your policies can be applied and enforced flexibly.
10. Don't neglect the front end.

There is no question that the software-defined data center model holds the key to IT service automation. Using private and public clouds to automate infrastructure provisioning and the delivery of personalized, automated IT services can make the business more agile and responsive, boost development team productivity, and speed time to market for end users.

The question is, what's the best way to get started on the journey to cloud-based IT service automation? What are the key considerations strategically, operationally, organizationally, and technically? This business brief offers guidance based on the combined expertise of VMware Professional Services, enabling you to create your IT services strategy from a unique starting point: Reality.

Strategic Tips

#1. Consider the full spectrum of automation opportunities.
Sometimes it's easy to focus on addressing one particular pain point—and miss opportunities elsewhere. Make sure you consider multiple use cases for automation. For example, some companies focus only on the creation of a service catalog or push-button, self-service IT infrastructure provisioning. But cloud-based automation can also benefit developers, administrators, and the business as a whole. For instance:

- Leveraging the cloud to automate the application release cycle or software maintenance processes (such as patching) can dramatically increase developer productivity
- Automation of service monitoring can allow administrators to focus on higher-value activities
- Automated reclamation processes can extend the useful life of key resources and increase utilization rates, helping to reduce capital outlays for new systems
- Automating and orchestrating multi-vendor, multi-cloud services can dramatically expand the agility of the business

#2. Use automation as a catalyst for innovation.
Automating key IT processes can lead to an unexpected and frequently overlooked side effect: The ability to innovate. When IT administrators and development teams are no longer spending the majority of their time performing manual tasks over and over again, they suddenly have time to explore—and test—new ideas. They can spend more time creating a new service that solves a core problem or makes the customer experience better. They can find a better way to boost productivity or achieve compliance or save money.

Equally important, the IT department has more time to explore ideas from multiple sources—such as lines of business (LOBs), departments, partners, and even customers. Relieved of the burden of manual-everything, IT can lay the foundation for innovation throughout the business and its whole ecosystem. Simply put, there's a multiplier effect, and the surge in innovations adds up to better IT outcomes.

#3. Get some quick wins.

When preparing your cloud-based automation strategy, it's important to consider the short-term and long-term goals separately—and to make sure your short-term plan will provide some early successes. Focus on opportunities to solve an immediate pain point quickly. Ask yourself, what is the most time-consuming, tedious, manual task IT administrators or developers are spending time on right now? Make that task a starting point. A quick win there will help you garner support among business and end-user constituents, cost-justify the long-term elements of the strategy, and build momentum for your automation plan.

Operational Tips

#4. Assess your organization's readiness and maturity levels honestly.

Many organizations focus on the "vision" of cloud-based automation or the technological requirements and lose sight of whether the IT staff is properly prepared for the new world. The fact is, moving to the cloud model will require new skills, new processes, and a new organizational structure. So think about and talk about what "organizing for the cloud" means to your IT staff, and make every effort to get buy-in for the new organization structure from all stakeholders. You'll get important feedback that will help accelerate and improve your implementation of cloud-based automation, and the support you receive may spell the difference between success and failure.

#5. Know your processes.

IT processes change and evolve naturally over time. So when it's time to make the move to cloud-based automation, take the opportunity to review your processes to see how they might be improved by automation. When you begin planning your move to automation, also plan to thoroughly review, update, and document your IT processes—because they'll be impacted by automation. With this solid foundation, you will be in a better position to understand exactly how automation will impact your processes and change the roles and responsibilities of the people who implement them.

#6. Don't underestimate the importance of education.

Many of VMware's customers employ exceptionally talented IT professionals with a broad range of skills. However, the move to cloud-based service automation will pose new challenges for the IT staff, particularly when it comes to deploying and using new solutions. It is critical that stakeholders understand the full range of advanced features and capabilities the products provide, such analytics, dynamic thresholds, dashboards, adapters, and so on, so that the full functionality—and value—of the new solutions can be realized. Education is the key to avoiding the expense and waste of "shelfware."

Technical Tips

#7. Take an end-to-end, lifecycle approach.

Make sure any cloud automation solution you are considering is capable of automating the end-to-end processes for delivering IT services as well as ongoing lifecycle management and release automation. It should give you the controls you need to enforce your IT policies and best practices. Also, make sure it can automate third-party infrastructure elements as well—from HP servers to Oracle storage to Cisco routers, and so on.

#8. Dig deep into the technical requirements.

All too often, enterprises overestimate or underestimate the scalability and extensibility requirements of cloud automation, and end up purchasing too much infrastructure and software licenses for the task at hand.

It is important, therefore, to thoroughly analyze, define, and document the technical requirements of executing your automation strategy, both short-term and over time. This way you can make sure the architecture you implement can truly scale on demand to accommodate your growth plans and avoid excessive CapEx, underutilized infrastructure, and unneeded licenses.

#9. Make sure your policies can be applied and enforced flexibly.

Make sure the cloud-based automation solution you implement can provide personalized, business-relevant policies to enforce your unique IT and business needs, and that its policy enforcement assures end users receive appropriately sized infrastructure resources or applications for the task at hand.

#10. Don't neglect the front end.

The user experience will ultimately make or break your cloud-based automation strategy. Make sure you spend the time and effort up front understanding end-user requirements—so that you can create push-button, self-service IT resources that people actually want to use.

Learn More

One short document can only address the basics of a complex topic such as cloud-based service automation. Learn more—and get started on your journey—by contacting VMware Professional Services www.vmware.com/consulting/

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