**Why the Google Apps Marketplace is the right model for on-demand software/apps vendors - The GroupCamp experience**

 By Dickel SOORIAH. Co-founder GroupCamp

The Google Apps marketplace has celebrated one year of integrated apps in 2011. We, at GroupCamp (http://www.groupcamp.com) have joined in 2011 and being listed in the Marketplace has been a successful business decision for us both in terms of the number of business customers but also in terms of the uniqueness of the model and the capabilities which it brings to cloud-based software vendors such as GroupCamp. The first obvious benefit is allowing a software vendor to gain access to Google Apps’ 3 million business users worldwide and 30 million users. Over the last 3 months in the marketplace, our listing has already received visits from buyers in 90 different countries.

**Google got the basics right - installation**

Purchasing cloud-based apps starts with email and office apps. The key reasons why SMBs are jumping on the cloud bandwagon include ease of use, reduced costs and innovative features. Once business users have moved to the cloud for their corporate email, the next step for productivity apps and CRM are next. Web-based business apps listing are now common with well defined categories and user-generated review systems. The Google Apps Marketplace is different in that the application can be set up and installed for all users of a company from the marketplace itself. There was one main challenge for a business apps marketplace which made it significantly different from an end-user consumer app marketplace such as Apple’s App Store and that main difference is the installation process.

The first and foremost thing Google got right is not just the user ratings and the product categories but the way to use the existing Google Apps identity as credentials for a third-party vendor without sharing identity information with that third-party vendor. The benefit for the user is a single-sign-on user experience between Google Apps and a project management app such as GroupCamp. By using technologies based on open standards such as OpenID, Google created a seamless user experience which also took into account privacy concerns from cloud-based apps users.

**Transparency in customer data privacy and on-demand pricing**

The philosophy of the new wave of on-demand software apps is transparency. Buyers can readily see what Google data will be exposed since vendors are required to list the set of APIs(Application Programming Interfaces) which are integrated by their application. This information is in turn checked for those vendors who have a data privacy certification delivered by TRUSTe to Google Apps Vendors. The audit by TRUSTe validates that vendors are requesting access only to the APIs with which they actually integrate and the purposes of that integration. For instance a CRM vendor would have to describe in their listing that access Google Contacts information is required to synchronize the your contact information with your CRM applications.

Transparency is also key for pricing and terms of service in general. This is the other perfect fit with Google Apps: the similar on-demand nature of our offerings: free trials are included, the client manages upgrades and downgrades and there are no lock-in contracts. The client in billed on a subscription basis and can cancel their account at any time.

**Access to Customer data – integration scenarios**

As mentioned before, exposing APIs to vendors is important, but the value for the client comes from the actual everyday use cases. One example of the unique character of the Google Apps Marketplace is email integration. This has traditionally taken the form of browser-based plug-ins or desktop clients. The Gmail contextual gadgets on the other hand allow all users of a domain to readily have access to their third-party app without having to leave the in-browser interface. No user or desktop installation is required.

Project management literature and methodologies such as Getting Things Done are full of guidelines on how users can avoid being overwhelmed by email. This integration is a concrete example of how an efficient web-based app can help process your inbox easily by readily transforming emails into project tasks.

**Using local partners to help customers move to the cloud**

The on-demand model allows a plug-and-play and ready-for-use purchasing behavior but with cloud-based apps, but specific clients will still need their local partners for installation, training and support. It is therefore essential that the new phase of cloud-based apps natively integrate reseller models both in terms of installation and revenue share. GroupCamp has found resellers in 15 different countries and most of them have a range of cloud-based apps in their portfolio. A large number of GroupCamp partners are also Google Apps resellers. Their objective is to build a large portfolio of cloud-based apps and act as local trusted advisors to small businesses to whom they provide a range of services starting with email and web site hosting. Our experience also shows that many voice, data and networking experts are moving into cloud-based apps to develop additional revenue streams on top of their existing network and telephony services. For local partners moving into the business of vertical apps such as productivity and CRM has helped build loyalty and synergies between different services.

**What web-based software vendors still need from marketplaces and what our clients had to say about the model**

For a vendor such as GroupCamp which supports multiple languages, a business apps marketplace with internationalization features is a must-have. A vendor listing needs to display which languages are supported for an app. Internationalization also means the ability to present listings in different languages. The Google Apps marketplace still lacks those features.

What did our clients have to say about the Marketplace model? Over and above the value of the integration, there was a surprising interest for obtaining a common user experience between Google Applications and third-party apps. It helps if usage scenarios in Google Docs follow the same set of common principles as in GroupCamp Project .

Overall the Marketplace model is widely adopted by our client base and synergies have worked both ways since GroupCamp has also converted GroupCamp clients to Google Apps. The most defining event in installable business apps marketplaces will be how Microsoft chooses to position the Office365 marketplace and how they accomodate installable apps from third-party vendors.