

VMware or OpenStack? Don't choose one; choose both!

✘ In the ever evolving world of virtualization, we are faced with new and exciting changes all the time. As a long time VMware customer and advocate, I am obviously very attached to the entire VMware ecosystem and the community that surrounds it.

Recently I've been doing a significant amount of OpenStack work, and I'm even writing a book on the subject, so that should indicate just how committed I've become to that environment. OpenStack is dubbed the "open cloud" and is clearly gaining recognition by the virtualization community as an upcoming player for public and private cloud deployments.

So the question has come up a few times to me: "Are you switching from VMware to OpenStack?". I have to say no, but at the same time I want to be clear that the question shouldn't have been "Are you switching?".

Co-opetition

A popular word that's been used with this sort of situation is co-opetition. This is a cross between co-operation and competition. What OpenStack and VMware do may be similar, but it is also very different in a lot of ways.



Two different views, but not that different after all.

What I'm doing by diving into the OpenStack world is to get a deeper view of how it can compare and contrast to VMware technologies in the same way that I study Citrix and Microsoft virtualization systems. It is part of our role as architects to be able to fully understand what each part of the product means to a current or potential customer.

OpenStack Challenges

There are a few distinct challenges in working with OpenStack. I like to say challenges, because they are solvable, or sometimes a non-issue altogether depending on your situation. These are simply talking points that get brought up most often when I'm discussing OpenStack with people.

- Volatility - Although it is in its 7th release with Grizzly this spring, there are concerns (some genuine) that the environment is volatile. What does volatile mean though? We will discuss below.
- Host OS support - Sorry WIntel folks, this one only works on Linux. Unlike vSphere though, which is also Linux based, this requires administration of the OS independent of the product and hypervisor.
- High Availability and Disaster Recovery - There are deployment methods to provide HA and DR scenarios, but many of the techniques are lacking full support, and require the use of other third party plugins and products to architect always-on solutions in certain scenarios.
- Vendor Support - This is the classic. Whether hardware vendor, software vendor, or consultant support, the ever wanted "five 9s" up-time and a 1-800 number to get 24/7/365 access for

support makes some folks nervous about putting their production workloads in an OpenStack environment that they have to manage.

Again, these are only challenges for certain customers. Plus, we also said the same thing about VMware ESX early on, and the same stood for Hyper-V in its first iterations.

Why choose?

This is the real question that needs to be asked. And the answer is easy: "Choose both!" There are probably use-cases for both products in your environment. And if there isn't today, you may find that in your current role, or in your future role you will inevitably be involved with looking at OpenStack somewhere along the way.

I myself am a big cloud proponent, but I am also fully aware of where cloud products are not the appropriate product for certain use-cases. In the same way, I will be doing similar evaluations of OpenStack, and just like other cloud products, it may not be the right fit.

The key to take away from this is that you don't need to have a vested interest in the product, but you should have a vested interest in your knowledge base to be able to offer the best solutions to your employer or customer for a virtualization product.

Don't Hesitate, Orchestrate

The side-effect of dabbling with technologies like OpenStack, vCloud, vCloud Hybrid Service and other great products, is that we begin to do exciting things internally to prepare ourselves to consume our IaaS environment. In order for us to get the most out of cloud deployment methodologies, we have to first build in the orchestration and automation processes that feed our cloud service.

Even if you aren't on the fast track to a cloud, whether public or private, you should be evaluating how you can improve your operational model in IT. You don't necessarily have to be a full DevOps environment, but making the move towards orchestrated builds will be the stepping stone to your successful cloud adoption when it does come.

Is OpenStack the <insert cloud vendor here> Killer?

As we've learned from the mobile phone market, the long sought after "iPhone killer" has never come. What has come though is a relatively strong share of the mobile marketplace being pared down and split among other strong competitive vendors.

So the questions coming in about whether OpenStack is the AWS killer, or the vCloud killer, are really all just noise which creates headlines. Will OpenStack cut into the market share of those, and other vendors? Absolutely. Will it be a significant impact? We have to wait and see, but all signs point to this being a strong player in both the public and private cloud space.

It certainly creates buzz when we see posts like the open letter from Randy Bias at Cloudscaling come out calling for OpenStack to adopt AWS and other comparative compute engines as the core for public cloud deployment. That letter (<http://www.cloudscaling.com/blog/cloud-computing/openstack-aws/>) tells you that this is a disruptive movement for sure. But, disruptive in this sense is a very positive move.

Get Knowledge, Make an Informed Decision

Now is the time to get involved, and to dig into the technology so that when the time does come to evaluate OpenStack or vCloud that you have all the information needed to make an informed decision.

A great resource for you to get started is the Couch to OpenStack series offered by the #vBrownbag community. The weekly Podcast run live on Tuesday evenings at 8PM Central time are doing a ground up installation of an OpenStack private cloud and you can view the archived sessions as they are uploaded in case you can't attend the live sessions: <http://openstack.prov12n.com/vbrownbag-podcast-couch-to-openstack/>

I look forward to sharing the journey with vCloud, OpenStack and many other exciting products over the next few months. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to drop me a line at twitter.com/DiscoPosse or through the comments on this site.