IBM

Business challenge

A few years ago, Zilker Technology spotted many commercial opportunities that were priced out of the market by the high costs of on-premise deployment. How could the company overcome the barrier?

Transformation

By stepping into the cloud, Zilker Technology is transforming small ideas into big successes, expanding into new areas such as security, managed services, cognitive solutions and more to create a booming business.

Business benefits:

10x faster
creation of demos for customers

4x quicker
deployments for clients

8x growth
in just three years

Zilker Technology
Finds the keys to unlocking fresh commercial opportunities in cloud

Zilker Technology combines global consultancy experience with the agility of a start-up to provide customers of all sizes, industries, geographies and technologies with competitive advantage. Headquartered in Austin, Texas, the company also operates offices in San Francisco, Belgrade in Serbia, and Chennai in India.

"IBM has played a pivotal role in our business transformation in so many ways."

—Mark Lucente
Managing Partner and Technical Director
Zilker Technology

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Opportunities ripe for the taking

Have you ever had a great idea, but not the time and cash to get it off the ground? A few years ago, thousands of companies found themselves in this situation. Smartphone usage had skyrocketed and users were becoming increasingly glued to their screens. Yet still there was nothing like the number or diversity of mobile apps that we see on the market today.

So what changed between then and now? People were already brimming with ideas for new mobile apps, so why didn't they put them into practice?

Mark Lucente, Managing Partner and Technical Director at Zilker Technology offers some valuable insight: "Back in 2014, mobile had become an established channel, and lots of companies came up with great ideas for neat little apps to engage their customers and create a buzz around their brands. So why didn't those ideas make it off the drawing board and into customers' palms? Well, at the time, most organizations were still focused on on-premise deployments.

"Using the on-premise model, delivering even a fairly simple mobile app was time-consuming and expensive, because companies needed to think not just about designing a great app experience and consistency with their other channels, but also about hardware to run it, security mechanisms to keep customer data safe, support procedures, deployment procedures, and monitoring procedures to maintain the solution.

"Understandably, these complexities were off-putting for many prospective clients. We saw an opportunity: if we could find a way to reduce the time, cost and complexity, we could bring engaging apps into the reach of many more customers, and grow our own business. We set out to find a way to transform our vision into reality."

Taking the leap

In its quest for a solution, Zilker Technology turned to the cloud. Mark Lucente continues: "Cloud was a total game-changer."

"Previously, the on-premise approach forced us to present clients with a significant upfront investment, and it could easily take months or even years depending on the client's internal IT procedures. With cloud, suddenly we could offer deployment in a few months – often four times faster than before – and in some cases in a matter of weeks. Additionally, clients could opt for a pay-as-you-go cloud subscription model, helping them spread costs and reduce risk.

"Overnight, cloud brought mobile & multi-channel applications within reach of many new organizations, and we moved fast to snap up fresh opportunities and win new business. For example, we started building custom applications for festivals – an initiative that would have been prohibitively expensive with an on-premise model."

For larger companies, cloud has enabled Zilker Technology to launch entire application platforms, from the glass to the data, at attractive price-points. For example, Zilker Technology is helping a major automotive leasing and rental business to establish an enhanced user experience.

Zilker soon moved beyond mobile and started looking to harness cloud to offer a wealth of new offerings in a highly cost-effective manner. The company rapidly broadened its portfolio to include security platforms, managed services, cognitive solutions, content management platforms, e-commerce solutions, analytics tools and more. For example, Zilker Technology recently built an energy safety portal for a power company, helping to monitor and improve safety in real time.

Mark Lucente adds: "IBM Cloud gives us is single cloud environment that helps us to meet the vast majority of our clients' business and technical requirements. In cloud terminology, this means that IBM enables us to leverage Platform-as-a-Service [PaaS], Infrastructure-as-a-Service [IaaS] and Software-as-a-Service [SaaS] offerings, helping us to find the best fit with our customers' business goals and budget requirements.

"Cloud brings technologies within reach of different types of customers for the very first time. It's not just mobile applications that have become more accessible – even things like data science are so much more straightforward than before, as we can plug and play powerful solutions from leading vendors like IBM.

"For companies who are willing to step out of their comfort zone and look beyond previous ways of working, cloud can offer tremendous opportunities to transform their business and gain competitive advantage.

"One of the leading drivers of our success in hybrid cloud deployments is that we know and understand both sides of the firewall, namely a company's long-standing systems of record and the new public cloud offerings. Because we know our clients' deep-seated enterprise requirements from years of experience, we are in a unique position to be able to connect traditional systems with new offerings such as web, mobile or data science to deliver real value-add. Standalone public cloud offerings cannot match that value proposition because they don't tie in neatly with clients' existing legacy enterprise applications."

He continues: "Cloud doesn't just pave the way for us to offer new types of solutions; it has also forged a path for us to launch managed-service offerings. For instance, when a company cannot hand off their day-to-day work to an internal support organization, they are unable to free up resources for innovation. It becomes like wearing lead boots – they simply won't be able to move very quickly.

"Because cloud solutions don't really sit in-house for our customers, it is much easier for them to hand off management to us, so they can focus on the next initiative. The service has been a hit with our clients, and we now offer 24/7 support between our teams in North America, Europe and India. Furthermore, our managed services also include critical elements such as security, continuous testing, monitoring and even patching, which we can offer very cost-effectively thanks to our new highly skilled offshore development teams."

To drive its transformation, Zilker Technology has needed to adapt its in-house skill set. The company has grown rapidly since its inception, and many of the new hires have been full-stack, cloud-native developers, who can support clients in all elements of a cloud service.

To further sharpen employees' skills, Zilker Technology takes part in IBM boot camps and is developing expertise in IBM Cloud Garage methodologies.

As part of its transition to cloud, Zilker Technology has transformed its approach to sales pitches. By leveraging existing cloud services, the company can create functioning POCs ten times faster than before and in some cases even offer a same-day turnaround. For example, in a recent project with an insurer, Zilker Technology built a demo using a combination of IBM Cloud and IBM API Connect, in just two hours. In another venture, Zilker Technology built a POC and enabled the client to access it via single sign-on using their email address, thanks to IBM App ID. As a result, the client enjoyed a rapid result, and Zilker Technology won the bid.

Mark Lucente comments: "Cloud enables us to deliver much more responsive service to our clients. In particular, if a client has a new idea, we can seize the moment by showing them a functioning demo within an extremely short timeframe, capturing their imagination and helping us close more deals."

Zilker Technology also takes advantage of cloud solutions to support its own business. For example, the company analyzes its financial results using IBM Watson Analytics™, and hosts some of its web presence on Node.js, NoSQL, and other cloud-native runtimes.

"We are a young, energetic company, and our personnel are our greatest asset," continues Mark Lucente. "If we occupy our staff with day-to-day IT management, they won't have time to innovate, bring in new clients, and propel our business forwards. By harnessing cloud solutions, we free up our people to focus on where they deliver the greatest value to our business. Furthermore, cloud helps us avoid tying up our cash flow, so we can invest more in innovation. On top of that, by using cloud solutions ourselves, we can better empathize with our customers, gain a deeper understanding of their needs, and identify areas for improvement."

Seizing the moment

Cloud solutions are helping employees at Zilker Technology work more productively, so they can provide better service to a growing number of clients more efficiently. As a result, the company is able to handle a much larger pipeline of new leads to fuel its booming business. Zilker Technology's success has been outstanding, with three-fold growth in the first year and eight-fold growth within three years.

Because quality is so high, customers keep coming back for more. In fact, around 40 clients have engaged Zilker Technology on multiple projects, and some of its original customers are still working with Zilker Technology on their fifth or sixth project. Zilker Technology positions solution architects on-site at these customer locations, so they can start preparing for a new solution as they finish the current implementation. Thanks to this approach, Zilker Technology can inspire greater customer loyalty and win more repeat business.

Zilker Technology is currently experimenting with building state-of-the-art cognitive solutions based on IBM Watson® PaaS offerings. For example, the company is exploring possibilities to combine services such as IBM Watson Personality Insights with IBM Watson Discovery to help determine whether, for instance, a particular promotion is likely to interest a certain customer. Zilker Technology may choose to develop its own intellectual property in future, which its consultants can harness as they craft tailor-made solutions for clients.

Mark Lucente concludes: "IBM has played a pivotal role in our business transformation in so many ways. Of course, a big factor is the wide-ranging, rock-solid services from IBM Cloud. Additionally, we organize many joint events with IBM – including one a few days ago around Blockchain that has already sparked two follow-up events and several sales leads and is the best go-to-market I have ever seen. Furthermore, IBM Global Financing helps us close deals and is particularly handy when a client needs a solution now but only has budget available next year.

"We have already come a long way in just a few short years, and we are confident that with IBM at our side, we can continue to drive excellence, win new clients and achieve glittering commercial success."

Solution components

- IBM® API Connect
- IBM App ID
- IBM Cloud
- IBM Cloud technology components such as IBM SDK for Node.js, NoSQL databases, and Kubernetes containers
- IBM Global Financing
- IBM IaaS for virtual and dedicated servers and cloud connectivity
- IBM Watson® IaaS and SaaS services

Take the next step

To learn more about the IBM Cloud, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: ibm.com/cloud

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