

ESG Brief

Cisco and IBM Create VersaStack Converged Infrastructure

Date: February 2015 **Author:** Mark Bowker, Senior Analyst

Abstract: Long-time collaborators IBM and Cisco recently introduced a new converged infrastructure solution, VersaStack. Available through IBM and Cisco's qualified business partners, this new solution focuses on making cloud, big data and analytics, and mobile deployments attainable and efficiently packaged for simplified deployment. This solution gives IBM and Cisco a unique advantage in the integrated full-stack market, as long as it can demonstrate the value of the B Series Blade Servers coupled to the strategic direction Cisco is headed in with ACI architectures, and Cisco Intercloud Fabric with IBM's enterprise accounts.

Overview

On December 4, 2014, Cisco and IBM made a joint product announcement that introduced VersaStack, a new, integrated solution combining the Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) integrated infrastructure with the IBM Storwize storage system. The long-time collaborators are promoting VersaStack as a powerful solution designed to deliver high levels of ease, efficiency, and versatility for cloud, big data and analytics, and mobility deployments.

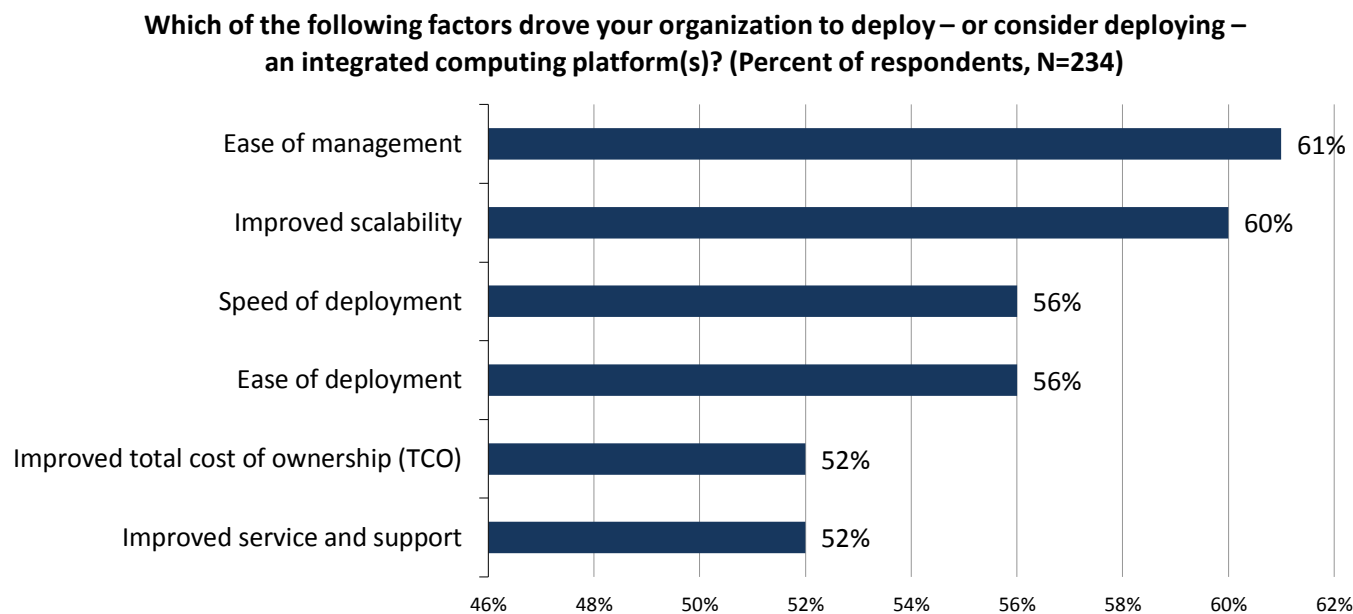
Based on Cisco Validated Design (CVD) reference architectures, this initial VersaStack solution targets data center and private cloud deployments as well as big data and analytics for large commercial and enterprise customers. Over time, the platform will be optimized for IBM business applications while integrating Cisco Application Centric Infrastructure (ACI) and Cisco Intercloud Fabric. The solution will be sold globally through qualified business partners experienced in Cisco data center technologies and IBM Storwize storage systems. IBM's Global Technology Services will offer services ranging from strategy through maintenance, and solution support services will be available from Cisco, IBM, and qualified business partners.

Ease of Use, Efficiency, and Versatility

Cisco and IBM have been collaborators for well over a decade, and their combined solutions serve more than 25,000 global customers. Areas of collaboration focus on big data and analytics, cloud, data center, Internet of Things, and software-defined networking. With the VersaStack announcement, enterprise customers across the board will have an alternative to a traditional mixture of siloed products so they can effectively streamline the deployment and operation of their IT infrastructure. Ease of management, improved scalability, speed and ease of deployment, improved TCO, and improved service and support are the main reasons why many companies are looking for integrated full stack solutions (see Figure 1)¹.

¹ Source: ESG Research Report, [Trends in Private Cloud Infrastructure](#), April 2014.

Figure 1. Most Common Reasons for Deploying/Considering an Integrated Computing Platform



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, 2015.

What VersaStack Means for Enterprises

When it comes to simplifying deployment and operation of IT infrastructure and applications, many organizations are focused on finding more strategic alternatives to traditional solutions that are labor-intensive, cumbersome, and both time and resource sinkholes. These alternatives must ensure that storage, compute, and network technologies not only work together, but can be managed as a whole as well. The bottom line is that organizations want to deploy and scale applications faster to drive revenue, increase resource utilization, and reduce risk and TCO. Who wouldn't? VersaStack should be able to provide organizations with a solution to do just that.

The VersaStack solution:

- Brings together Cisco UCS Integrated Infrastructure and IBM Storwize V7000 storage system. Cisco UCS Integrated Infrastructure includes the Cisco Unified Computing System, Cisco Nexus and Cisco MDS switches, and UCS Director for automated workflows.
 - Cisco UCS Integrated infrastructure is based on the Cisco unified computing system that accelerates application delivery and improves the ability to adapt to business change via its holistic infrastructure management.
 - IBM Storwize V7000 includes technologies that complement and enhance virtual environments with built-in functions such as data virtualization, hardware-accelerated Real-time Compression, and Easy Tier, which automatically migrates data between tiers based on real-time usage patterns for efficient virtualized storage for enterprise applications.
- Includes multi-hypervisor support, Cisco application-centric infrastructure, Cisco Intercloud capabilities, UCS Director for policy-based resource management, IBM software tools for network and information management, big data and analytics, and mobility with IBM MobileFirst.
- Is delivered by qualified channel partners and will be supported by IBM Services and Cisco Services.

The potential Cisco and IBM advantage lies with the customer relationship, and how the vendors leverage that relationship to insert VersaStack. How VersaStack is positioned amongst existing IBM Pure System solutions and a growing Cisco partner ecosystem focused on converged and hyperconverged solutions will be the key performance

indicator to monitor.² IT professionals should be able to quickly see if this is a lightweight meet in the channel strategy, or a strategic partnership that will help accomplish their top IT priorities that include virtualization, hybrid cloud consumption, orchestration, and automation.

The Bigger Truth

IBM and Cisco understand the requirements of their enterprise audience today—focusing on a holistic means to streamline traditional IT infrastructure as well as manage it efficiently with a full stack solution, and leverage one another's enterprise experience and expertise. While VersaStack is designed to satisfy the needs of their customers, to stay ahead of the competition, Cisco and IBM must concentrate on continuing to find new ways to further simplify IT management, enhance productivity, and reduce risk and TCO. To do this, these vendors need to ensure the solution is optimized for the IT professional who already places a high level of trust and credibility in IBM and Cisco, and has a clear understanding of the strategic direction these companies are taking. This partnership between Cisco and IBM comprises more than bolting a few pieces of hardware together, and the relationship should be recognized for its ability to strategically engage enterprise customers and accelerate Cisco ACI and Intercloud Fabric with critical business workloads into the enterprise.

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² Source: ESG blog, Bowker, M., [Cisco: See No EVO, Hear No EVO, Speak New Partnerships](#), December 2014.