

REPORT REPRINT

CenturyLink launches managed big data as a service with Cloudera, on bare metal

JAMES CURTIS

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At a time when Hadoop in the cloud is getting a lot of traction, CenturyLink enters the fray with a managed big data-as-a-service offering based on Cloudera — served up on bare-metal servers.

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CenturyLink is releasing a managed big data as a service with Cloudera. The Hadoop cloud space is heating up, and there are already a number of Hadoop-based cloud options available in the market.

CenturyLink's offering delivers professional services, as well as on-ramp services to help organizations reach data productivity quickly based on an organization's defined use cases. And while other cloud providers are focusing on virtual servers, CenturyLink provides its service on bare metal.

THE 451 TAKE

CenturyLink is coming at the cloud-computing services market from the angle of a telecom vendor with capabilities on the networking front. That could likely work in CenturyLink's favor, particularly since it has skills in managing networks, as well as deep security capabilities. But organizations may not think of CenturyLink when it comes to Hadoop cloud services, so the firm has some evangelizing to do to raise its profile in this fast-growing market. However, CenturyLink is off to good start by picking a reputable partner in Cloudera, bulking up on professional services, and delivering the service on bare-metal infrastructure.

CONTEXT

At a time when other telecom vendors are deemphasizing cloud initiatives, CenturyLink seems to be doing the opposite, and driving forward with cloud services to complement the company's networking capabilities. Evidence of this strategy appears with CenturyLink releasing its managed big data as a service with Cloudera. The timing appears to be good for CenturyLink in that the big-data cloud space, and particularly Hadoop, has been steadily gaining momentum.

We noted in a recent report series how we segment big-data cloud services. At one end, Hadoop is offered on IaaS, where users carry the bulk of the responsibility. At the other end of the spectrum are fully managed cloud services, where the bulk of managing the infrastructure lies with the cloud provider, and users primarily concentrate on developing and managing jobs and workloads. It's the latter side where CenturyLink's latest big data as a service resides.

MANAGED CLOUD SERVICE

CenturyLink's managed cloud service consists of three core components. First, CenturyLink will offer a managed infrastructure, delivered on bare-metal hardware. This is differentiated from the virtual servers generally offered for many cloud Hadoop environments such as Amazon Web Services' Amazon EMR, Microsoft's Azure HDInsight and Google's DataProc service.

While bare metal is a differentiator for CenturyLink, there are a few others offering it. Further, CenturyLink points to its networking expertise, as well as its security capabilities, hearkening back to the company's telecom roots as a core differentiator on the infrastructure side.

Second, the service is based on Cloudera. As CenturyLink notes, it has a strong alliance with Cloudera, the Hadoop specialist having initially teamed up with the company via its now subsumed Savvis hosting and cloud business. The companies have been in tight collaboration to roll out this service and have teamed up, for instance, on integrating CenturyLink's scripts with Cloudera's API to drive fast deployment on the servers.

Finally, CenturyLink is including professional services for data analytics, as well as consulting services. CenturyLink will maintain a collection of data scientists and data engineers to help drill down into an organization's use cases.

GO-TO-MARKET STRATEGY

CenturyLink envisions a variety of customers interested in its managed Cloudera service, from midmarket to large enterprises. CenturyLink is emphasizing a fast time-to-value approach, with the idea of getting customers up and going quickly, and being as effective as possible with their use cases.

But CenturyLink also notes the comprehensive nature of its offering, which includes a fully managed infrastructure, as well as its broad services that provide for deploying and managing the environment to doubling down on driving value with advanced analytics.

More specifically, CenturyLink is rolling out two initiatives to get customers going. One is the Quick Start initiative that spans anywhere from three to 12 weeks in duration, depending on the customer's use cases and the complexity of the environment. As its name implies, CenturyLink is focused on helping customers articulate and implement BI or analytical use cases, and achieve success as quickly as possible.

The other is CenturyLink's Data-to-Decisions Workshop. This workshop is directed by CenturyLink data scientists and/or big-data engineers, and is meant to help customers get to a defined end-state vision. The Data-to-Decisions Workshop can span anywhere from two to eight weeks, although CenturyLink does offer a shortened version that can be part of the Quick Start program.

CenturyLink will offer single monthly pricing, depending on the customer's environment complexity, that will include the cloud infrastructure, Cloudera licensing and professional services.

COMPETITION

At a macro level, CenturyLink competes with the larger telecom players such as AT&T, Windstream/EarthLink and Verizon. But with its big data-as-a-service offering, CenturyLink will see vendors pitching Hadoop-based cloud services. While there are a number of vendors with big-data (Hadoop) cloud services, CenturyLink may not encounter all of them.

For instance, in the Hadoop on IaaS space, we find many of the commercial Hadoop distributors, which include Cloudera with its Director offering that enables organizations to spin up Cloudera on IaaS on public cloud platforms. The difference with CenturyLink's offering is its professional services component, and the fact that CenturyLink takes responsibility for managing Hadoop on the infrastructure side. With IaaS, the user assumes that role.

With HaaS, which includes AWS EMR, Azure HDInsight, Google Dataproc and IBM BigInsights on Bluemix, the user still bears the bulk of the responsibility in managing the Hadoop environment, even though the cloud service provider pitches a fast time-to-value proposition.

Given that, CenturyLink will compete primarily in the managed Hadoop services space, where we anticipate the company will see a handful of vendors. Altiscale (recently acquired by SAP) has its Altiscale Data Cloud offering that includes both a managed Hadoop and Spark service that runs on a company's own datacenter infrastructure. Qubole offers cloud services besides Hadoop such as Spark, Hive, HBase and Presto. Qubole, however, leverages the public cloud platform vendors: AWS, Azure and Google Cloud Platforms.

Oracle offers its Big Data Cloud Service that runs Cloudera under the covers. Cazena is another potential competitor with its managed big-data cloud service that uses Hadoop as well as data-warehousing technology for processing. There is also a collection of vendors providing bare-metal servers, including IBM Bluemix (formerly SoftLayer) with Cloudera, Oracle and Rackspace.

On the Hadoop services side, Teradata's Think Big is a likely competitor because the firm peddles a collection of professional services, including managed services. Other services firms include IBM Global Services and Verizon Enterprise Services.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

CenturyLink has put together an offering that includes managed Cloudera, professional services and methods to on-ramp customers. The company is also delivering on bare-metal infrastructure for performance gains over virtualized environments.

WEAKNESSES

Well known for telecom and networking, CenturyLink is less known in the cloud computing services space, particularly for big-data services.

OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges continue to exist for those jumping into Hadoop. CenturyLink can ease those challenges with professional services upfront, with a concerted strategy on 'time to value.' Organizations that may have stumbled early on with big-data deployments should view CenturyLink as a means to overcome those hurdles, because they will be open to a managed service.

THREATS

There are a number of vendors with a presence in the cloud space that are offering various types of Hadoop cloud services, ranging from Hadoop on IaaS to HaaS to managed Hadoop services. The pressure will be on CenturyLink to carry out some evangelizing to get its name out there in the managed cloud space, specifically noting its value-add components.