

# GLOBAL MICRO

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# ON CLOUD NINE

*South African businesses are surprisingly well served with their computer needs and are often in the vanguard of what is new, as Alan Swaby learns*







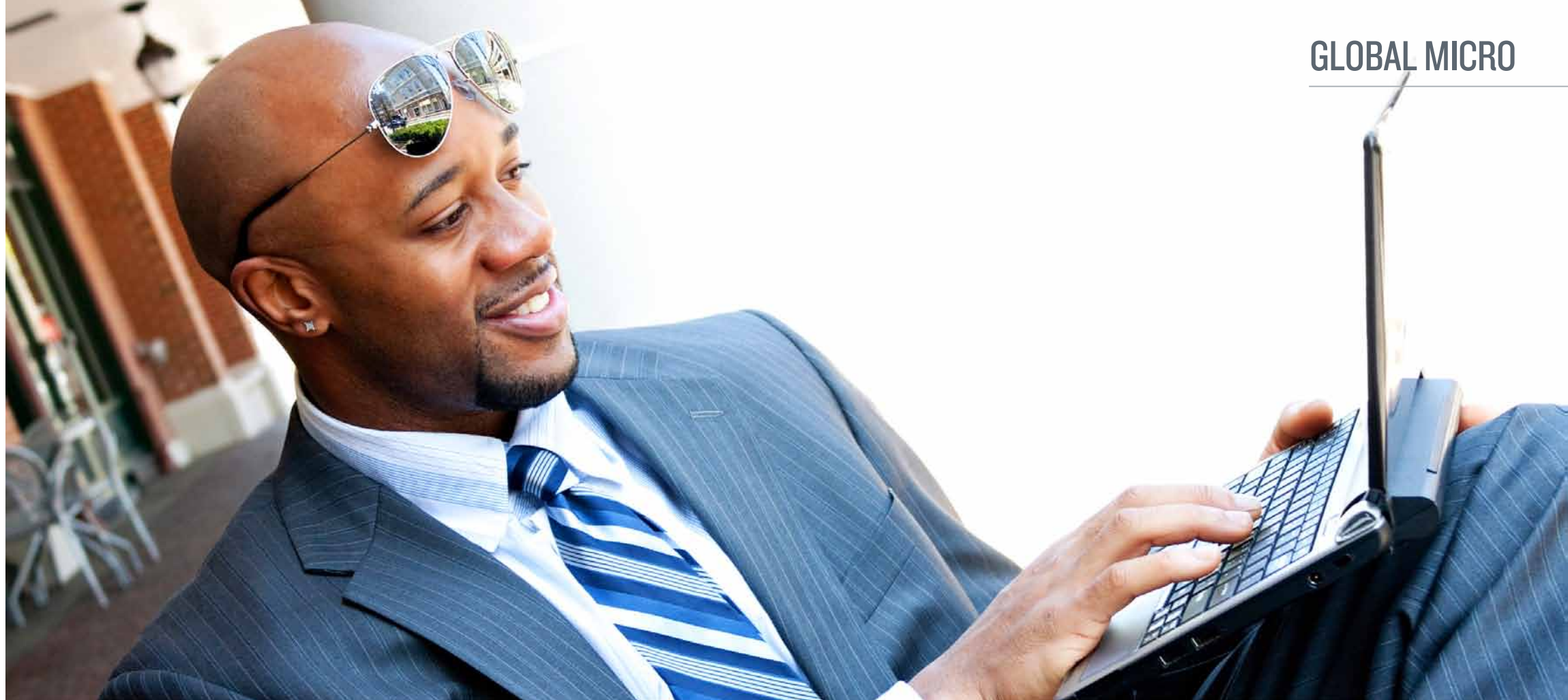
When Y2K was looming down on businesses at the end of the century, no one was really sure if the whole house of cards would crumble or not. JJ Milner, founder and head of South Africa's largest Microsoft hosting provider, felt that it wouldn't; but he understood that his many clients preferred something more concrete to go on than just his gut instinct.

And so another chapter in the 20-year history of Global Micro was opened. Started by Milner and a number of other technology associates as a conventional Microsoft partner—providing cables, hardware, software and the like—the business has morphed many times as technology and the way clients work have changed.

In a nutshell, Global Micro provides all the services a client needs to build and maintain an IT platform on which to run the programmes it needs to function—it is an outsourced alternative to a company investing in its own support staff. Working closely with Microsoft, over its short history Global Micro has been awarded with nine Microsoft Gold Certifications.

Today the buzz word on everyone's lips is 'private cloud computing' and as far as Global Micro is concerned, it started with Y2K. "We created a virtual back-up for our clients' activities," says Milner, "containing everything necessary for their businesses to continue functioning smoothly in the event of a catastrophe happening. But the odd thing was that during the rehearsals that were held, clients found they preferred the





hosted back-up system to the way they were currently working. And so, Global Micro’s hosting services came into being.”

In fact, Global Micro was very quick off the mark and was not only the first in South Africa but the fifth provider to go live anywhere in the entire world. Today it provides back-up, email, security and monitoring for 300 reference clients with over 250,000 users. It’s the only hoster with two independent local data centres, achieving a 99.95 per cent uptime.

“The major advantages of switching to cloud computing,” explains Milner, “are lower running costs, greater flexibility and more predictable operating costs. With it being a web-accessed service, it can be used anywhere there is an internet connection and on an increasingly wide range of devices.”

Rather than buying and maintaining their own server, clients pay a fee per user to log onto Global Micro’s much larger servers, thereby instantly lowering running costs by leveraging Global Micro’s economies of scale. Should there be a short term need for more computer capacity or for longer term structural increases or decreases, these are accommodated without drama. No longer will a company experiencing a drop in demand be left paying for excessive

computing power. No longer will growth be hampered by lack of capital necessary to invest in additional IT equipment. The slack is taken up by Global Micro.

While clients are invariably attracted by the prospect of lower operating costs, they naturally have concerns about the security aspect of putting all their trust in a virtual service. Here, Milner is quick to strike a note of warning that cloud computing is

not for everyone. “We have a responsibility to temper enthusiasm,” he says. “As with all new business opportunities, cloud computing has attracted lots of competing suppliers and as always, some are better than others. Clients in South Africa especially need to be cautious because even though the country’s communications systems are good, they are not always good enough—and they need to reassure themselves on the robustness of any hosted infrastructure they are offered.

“We have been involved with cloud computing for over a decade,” Milner

One benefit of switching to cloud computing is greater flexibility

**NINE**  
 .....  
 Number of Microsoft Gold Certifications awarded to Global Micro to date

continues, “and still the level of awareness among potential users has a long way to go. Much of our time is spent on education.”

One of the most remarkable aspects about Global Micro is that it is run by a staff of just 24. Almost everyone in the company is on the front line and the

best in the business at what they do. “We select very slowly and very carefully,” says Milner. “We’ve also made a conscious effort not to chase new clients simply in order to grow larger and larger.”

Instead, the company has developed another much more productive strategy.

“THE MAJOR ADVANTAGES OF SWITCHING TO CLOUD COMPUTING ARE LOWER RUNNING COSTS, GREATER FLEXIBILITY AND MORE PREDICTABLE OPERATING COSTS”





JJ Milner, managing director of Global Micro Solutions: Microsoft Hosting Partner of the Year 2010 and 2011



Private cloud computing is gaining popularity

## “WE HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH CLOUD COMPUTING FOR OVER A DECADE”

Global Micro is willing to pass on all its operational expertise to other suppliers who in turn build up their own network of clients. They are linked to Global Micro but unlike a franchise, no IP fees, percentages or royalties are charged and the partners retain their own identities. Operating more like a wholesaler, Global Micro sells blocks of its own cloud for partners to re-sell to their clients.

To date, Global has 19 such partnership

arrangements with several large names on the list: Telkom South Africa, Vox Telecom and the 5,000-strong dealerships of Mustek Electronics are all tapping into Global Micro's cloud.

Now, though, the pace is set to quicken dramatically with Microsoft—Global Micro's host and partner—getting into the cloud hosting business directly with Office 365, a product for sending emails, storing documents and collaborating online.

Featuring online versions of the familiar Microsoft Office suite, Office 365 is likely to be an attractive option for many businesses, both small and large.

Microsoft is pushing Office 365 through its existing partnership network and in many cases this might be an acceptable alternative but, nevertheless, Milner remains sanguine about the situation. “Microsoft's approach,” he explains, “has been to create a single product it can sell to the entire world under exactly the same conditions and we would be the first to advise clients to take this route if we consider it the best option.”

But Milner is confident that there will be enough clients wanting greater flexibility, refinement or personalisation

than Microsoft can offer—those who use BlackBerry, require email encryption or the peace of mind of their data being stored in South Africa rather than an overseas data centre for example. Paying in rand for lower cost local bandwidth is one benefit of a tailored Global Micro version.

“Office 365 will increase interest and awareness about cloud computing,” concludes Milner, “but we will always be there to find solutions for more complex needs.” ■■

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