SM - Hi, I'm Stephen McCormick, MSP Community Manager for Tubblog. The Hub for MSPs. And joining me today is James Steel, the MSP community champion for cloud computing provider, Linode. Hello, James, it's great to have you with me today.

JS - Stephen, I am so glad to be here, I have to say I have been, I think I've been a fan of Tubblog, since the early days of my career, really, it's been an indispensable resource. So it's kind of a bucket list thing. It's very exciting to get to get on and be chatting to you guys. Finally.

SM - Oh, thank you. Thank you, James, you give us too much credit. Thank you. Now, before we start, as a bit of background, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do at Linode? If you don't mind?

JS - Yeah, sure. So Linode is historically, really, really very popular with, with developers, and with businesses too. They're very keen to get into the MSP space. And my role really is to represent Linode, and Akamai within the MSP community. So that involves everything from making sure that we're out there and listening to partners at events, to making sure that you know, the full partner experience is the best they possibly can be when interacting with us, and also to sort of come up with marketing initiatives and that kind of thing. So it's a fully encompassing role, but a go-between between the business and the MSP community,

SM - Google, Microsoft and Amazon are often mentioned as the big three cloud providers. Now, where does Linode fits in the cloud provider market? And what is it that Linode does that is of more benefit to their customers than say, maybe the Big Three can offer?

JS - Yeah, it's a really good question to start with, I mean, obviously, most of the MSPs I talked to, they are using one of the 'hyperscalers' as we call them in the in the industry. While it would be lovely to think that, you know, MSPs might say, Okay, I'll abandon all my accreditations and move from, ...from the hyperscaler, that they're, you know, they're entrenched with totally, it's not a message... it's not realistic. But every customer they come across, I know, has different requirements. So different requirements, different priorities, where Linux is required, we offer a choice. So depending on what the project is, so it's another option in your stack, in lots of cases, for SMBs, it's may well be particularly for SMBs, it may well be a better fit. So in my experience of working with MSPs specifically, the first one tends to be price. So I would never recommend to any company that they go out there, and they try and compete solely on price, but you can't really get away from it. Linode is around 30% of the price of AWS. So that's if you're looking for… like an EC2 AWS equivalent, particularly as we head towards the economic downturn that provides partners with, you know, another option that may be more attractive to their customers, but also another option that perhaps their competitors aren't providing. So it's a case of really offering offering choice. The second reason is the quality of support. So, I mean, whether it's to discuss, you know, like a cloud migration, or perhaps you've got a specific technical issue, all partners can pick up the phone and speak to a Linux certified administrator, that's our kind of baseline for the level of certification our support team has. And that's 24/7 365. So unless you're spending a lot of money with, you know, one of the one of the larger one of the big three, I think you'd be doing very well indeed, to get that kind of experience. And that's one of the reasons I was so keen to come on board actually was that I could see, you know, support is so important to MSPs. IT makes it.

SM - It really is, isn't it? Yeah. Just being able to just pick up a phone and being able to speak to somebody directly. It's something that you can't really do without. So that's great. And what about the third thing?

JS - So the third one is really comes down to sort of simplicity. So if you imagine AWS has what 200 services, just to spin up a simple server does require a lot of configuration, you know, there's lots of things that they can do that we don't but if you're after storage compute, you can save an awful lot of billable hours on complex server configuration by simply using Linode where we literally Select an OS, select a server level, select a location and you're you know, you're away in under a minute shall we say.

SM - Brilliant, brilliant. Okay, so if I move on to my second question Linode have recently joined forces with Akamai. It's been all over the the presses. How does Akamai complement what Linode already provides and what exciting developments can we expect from this partnership in the future?

JS - Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the acquisition was actually another of the key reasons that I joined the business because it's, it is an exciting pairing. If you think about everything you want to do in the cloud, it all gets easier when you've got, you know, scale, locations, services, capabilities, at scale. What the Akamai acquisition lets us do is it obviously lets us provide significantly more scale, of course, but it also ticks a couple of really important boxes that we we didn't have before. So we focus on compute storage. But what we didn't have was that content delivery network, and that,

you know, obviously, that incredible security layer that they that they offer, to push that out to the edge. So I mean, you can imagine if you can, if you could provide all of that under one roof - the compute and the network, the security, that's a really exciting proposition, because you can basically offer a best-in-class, cloud-hosting, right to the edge solution at scale. The reason it's so important to us is it also lets us differentiate ourselves from other providers, perhaps that would have previously maybe been termed as in the same group, like the alternative cloud providers like DigitalOcean and OVH Cloud, Hetzner, and those guys. So yeah, there's, there's an awful lot of the roadmap. We're rolling out a lot of new locations to begin with, obviously, that's, that's quite high up there on the priority list. And I think, yeah, it's 2022 through 2023. It's gonna be very exciting.

SM - Brilliant. So we're going to shift, focus a little bit here and talk about cyber security. So as we know, cyber attacks have been on the rise for at least as long as I can recall. But according to a recent study that was conducted by RMM provider N-able, they believe that 90% of MSPs suffered a successful cyber attack within the last 18 months. What do you think are the challenges unique to cloud providers in cyber security? And how does Linode specifically handle their security? Is it baked in? Is it already integrated? Or is it something that you adapt on a per customer basis?

JS - Yeah, that's really interesting. When you I can really believe that stat. You can't move anywhere, can you really for it?

SM - It's everywhere isn't it.

JS - Yeah, security is obviously a top priority. I think it's number of elements. I mean, obviously, one of the main things to try and do is stop stop... attacks that involve maybe the server being compromised, and then used for malicious purposes. We tend to work well for free DDoS service, cloud Firewall, VLAN VPC, to protect servers from attacks. The other element is we do quite a lot of work on the sort of the sort of the content side as well. So a big element, obviously, is user behaviour. So if you have a look, we, we partner with people, like hacksploits, provide training courses on this stuff. And pretty much every bit of content we put out as some sort of element of security mentioned in it. Of course, the other element is as we're touching on earlier on now being part of Akamai, we have you know, Gartner top right quadrant services, you know, industry leading services, things like API security, zero trust security, account takeover security, and probably one of the best DDoS solutions out there. So yeah, we're really in a very good place to be offering a high level of security to our to our partners.

SM - Brilliant. Now, it's fair to say you you've been quite busy, recently. You've attended quite a few meetups including Kubecon in Valencia, Spain. You also did some, fantastic interviews. When you attended CompTIA's Channelcon in Chicago. And the CompTIA community meeting in Bristol, where you chaired a Q&A panel of MSPs that were talking about some of the... some of the biggest challenges MSPs have have to face today. If I could ask you about that panel session, what would you say were your biggest takeaways from that event? And maybe if you pick one of each, that that would be great.

JS - Yeah, sure. I mean, well, I mean, it's been a busy period, definitely. In terms of the... terms of the event itself. I mean, one of the messages from that and other events is really that, you know, in-person events are back and there's a real, real value there. And definitely it was really nice at that particular event to see people just getting together to bounce ideas around business challenges, and I have to give a shout out to CompTIA because those events, specifically, are very good at being able to, you know, to enable that sort of free-flowing conversation and problem solving between partners - really, really good to see that. So the events specifically, and obviously content is very important. I mean, cybersecurity, that was the first that was the first topic. So we got cybersecurity, recruitment and growth, the cybersecurity side I really liked, because they were talking about having the confidence in your own, your own knowledge and abilities, basically. So if you know, a security solution is best of breed, and that's what your customers should be doing. And don't settle for anything less. Offer them that, charge your worth, use the vendors as well. So, you know, don't be afraid to lean on vendors if you don't have the expertise. But the main message that I took away was, you know, if the customer is not interested in that, you know, taking your advice, maybe they're not a good fit, and maybe do need to walk away. Easy for the established ones to say, of course, I'm not so much for those that are sort of rising the ranks. But good advice, I think.

SM - Definitely. And what about for recruitment, then what's, what was your big takeaway there?

JS - Some interesting chats. Yeah, I got some interesting points coming out of that. I think the one that really resonated with me was this, this basically, you know, don't try and recruit the finished article. But that's really, you know, if you recruit a third line engineer, and they're willing to move from one business to another, it's quite possible that the same thing is gonna happen to you, you're gonna pay top money, and you know, are you going to end up with someone that's loyal? Are they going to potentially move on pretty quickly? It's quite possible. Instead, try and think more long term. Recruit people for perhaps the, the soft skills, the attitude aptitude, you know, so you're getting the right person, you're moulding them with your company culture, and, and empower them. And so hopefully, they're more likely to, you know, think they're more likely to stay around longer. And that was certainly the... certainly what the panel was saying, in their experience across the board really.

SM - Yeah, I mean, it, it does make perfect sense that if you, if you put in the time and the... and the effort to train some... somebody up to be very good at their job, they're more likely to actually stick around. I think so. I think that's a, that's an important one, especially where the talent pool for greater skills is, is a bit small, at the moment. So I think that's, I think that's a great attitude. So if we move on to growth, then what was your takeaway there? Would you say?

JS - Well, this has always been my favourite one is in more in the sales and marketing area. But one of the things that really stood out for me was, it was actually Andrew from Aabyss, I think, came up with this. It's his, his approach and it's about being 'uncopyable', which I was a little bit sceptical at first when I heard about it, but actually, it's... I can see how, you know, it really is a good approach. Basically, what he's saying is, you know, pull together your approach, have a unique approach to

how you do things, how you understand the customer's requirements and how you... and how you interact with them. Know your services, package them, but also package you know, your SLAs and every element of your service and actually brand them up. Actually, have a name for each different if you've got two tiers of service, or maybe even three, you know, have have a unique name and tier. So basically, what you're saying is, look, you know, when you come to compare a quote, with a, with a competitor, it's going to be very difficult, because what you're offering is something that is unique to you. And when you do that, it allows you to charge a premium. And when you charge a premium, there's more money coming in, and then you can offer a better service to your clients. Because you're obviously you're you're earning more. So I thought that was a really nice point. And it obviously is working very well, I have seen that, you know, I've seen that at play. So yeah, that was my, that was the one that really lasting a lasting memory from that session.

SM - Thank you. Right then. So, moving on to my next question, I've noticed that you've started to do a monthly roundup of news and resources for Linode partners, similar to our very own Tubbservatory.

JS - I don't know what you're talking about? Absolutely not. As you know, I've never looked at Tubblog. Yeah, alright. It's inspired. It's inspired. It's a great format.

SM - But one of the items that actually caught, caught my eye there was Linode partnering with KodeCloud to deliver certifications on deploying and maintaining Kubernetes clusters. So, is the certification side, something that Linode might continue? Or would you say this is just a one off?

JS - Yeah, I mean, I think the certifications and education piece is kind of you can probably think of it in a group and we try and, unlike some of the bigger providers, we try if we can make it so that, you know, you can be self-sufficient. There's basic training in the portal, but you don't need certification as such, certainly to use our services. But you can't get away from the fact that we are you know, we're an infrastructure provider, right. So, we've got your, you know, a blank canvas plus tools to help you create your project, whatever it might be. So, it's important that we you know, We need to find ways to make that happen. Those talented developers of today tinkering and taking part in things like we do a Hackathon. So, there's a small period of time where, you know, developers come along and produce a product. It's incredible. Like the standard of some of the... some applications that get developed. Some of them are probably better than some of the commercial stuff you see, honestly. You can see the talent out there. And it's really important that we're providing you know, the education and certification to help those guys become start-ups and then become the successful businesses of the future we want to we really want to work with. We do a lot of our own material. So you'll see that in our YouTube and our docs, but we do a lot also do a lot of collaboration. So things like this this this certification with KodeCloud, we do educational series, ebooks partner with Manning, Learn Kubernetes, Nigel Bolton, we also partner with your very own Richard Tubb has produced an ebook for MSPs educate about this, about the alternative cloud. So education, certification all rolled in is a very important part of our, part of our future and how we see us helping our target, helping our customers.

SM - Absolutely, absolutely. So we're coming to the end of this time now that we've got James, but I just wanted to ask you. So what's next for yourself? And for Linode? Is there anything in the... in the pipeline for the rest of 2022? Or, or into 2023? That you're particularly excited about?

JS - Yeah, I mean, honestly, since joining the business, I've been having an absolute blast working hard, but having a blast just in, just getting out to community events, really representing the business. And that's been a huge amount of fun. So, I'm looking forward to some more of that. More content creation and making sure that, you know, we can we can tell a message basically at scale, about the, about the business, obviously, next year, we're going to see far more in the way of interaction with Akamai. Hopefully leveraging some more of the benefits that that partnership, partnership brings. So really excited about that. Kind of... kind of more of the same and making sure that we're, you know, a brand that is well known in the MSP space, but also, yeah making the most of the the Akamai relationship.

SM - So watch this space. Right. So, if anyone has been watching this wants to get in touch with you, how's the best way they can go about doing that? Or if they want to find out more about what Linode offers? How can they do that?

JS - Yeah, sure. I mean, a good way actually is to come and check out, I run some sort of introductory partner Webinars. So, if you just want that 30,000 feet view, you're more than welcome to come and join us for half an hour, we run through everything about the products and programme, you can find that on Linode/events. If you'd like to speak to me directly, please feel free to connect on LinkedIn. It'll be great to say hi. Also @thedigitalsteel on Twitter, we have a a special promo, which is you get $100 Cloud credit for 60 days. So, if you want to use that you can head on over to our site. And of course, as a Tubblog listener, if you want to hit me up directly, we can make sure that you're you're well looked after and that that doesn't run out too soon.

SM - Brilliant. I just want to say that anything that we have mentioned in this video, we will we will be adding those links into the show notes there for you to go and peruse at your leisure. I just want to take this last opportunity to thank my guest today, James Steel. It's been an absolute pleasure talking to you today sir, thank you for your time.

JS - Thank you so much. My life's work is complete. As I said, I've really enjoyed it. Thanks, Stephen.

SM - Excellent. So that was James Steel of Linode and I've been Stephen McCormick for Tubblog: The Hub for MSPs. If you liked this video, please like it and subscribe, and we'll see you next time.