

The Potential for Cloud Technology



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Identifying the Potential for Cloud Technology in your Environment

What is Cloud? This is a question surrounded by question. To some it is an evolutionary shift in the way IT is delivered. To others, it is something we have been doing in one capacity or another for decades. In truth Cloud technology is both of these and a lot more. Our goal in this whitepaper is not to answer all of what cloud is or is not, but to discuss what it can mean to the operation of your business.

Cloud technology is as much an approach as it is any group of applications, hardware or clients. This approach; the utilization of application based software and remote storage, is more available due to an increase in bandwidth and technological developments. These changes have made it possible to take a giant leap in how IT service is delivered. But is the Cloud right for you? And how will the Cloud change the structure of your IT department?

Clouds are Everywhere

Let's begin with some succinct and clear definitions of what different types of clouds are out there.

The simplest way to look at cloud is to look at how it applies to the different layers of technology. One reason cloud can be so complicated to understand is because often two people may be discussing “the Cloud” from different levels of utilization.

In a traditional system stack you have 3 layers; Servers & Storage, Platform Software, and Application Software. Each of these layers relate directly to new cloud technologies. If you have ever heard of or utilized Infrastructure as a Service, or offsite co-location storage, this is the cloud. In some cases this storage is shared by many companies (public), secured for only your company (private), or flexible to your needs (pay as you go). The second layer, Platform Software is also often offered as a service. Platform as a Service is most commonly used when a lot of flexibility is needed such as database management, security etc.

The top layer, Application Software, is the most expansive cloud technology and is offered as Software as a Service. Software as a Service is any time you are utilizing a technology without a hard copy downloaded to your device. Words such as application, hosted, community and plug in all refer to ‘Cloud’ services. The word Application may give you an idea as to where most of us are fully emerged in cloud technology. Still not sure? Well I’m sure “there’s an app for that.”

Which Cloud(s) are right for me?

One of the biggest advantages to the Cloud is that it makes enterprise solutions available to small business, and individual consumers without the need for enterprise level hardware. Cloud storage became available thanks to advances in server virtualization as well as the commonality of high bandwidth internet. By sending storage to the cloud you have the advantage of using pay as you go terms, thus eliminating the need for costly new servers and cutting a large part of your energy bill. However, you are also trusting your information to be secure, protected and available when you need it, without having it on site.

There are many best practices to be aware of with cloud storage, from what country your cloud is located in, to where it is replicated, and what government regulations are honored at those sights. Many companies, especially with security concerns utilize what is commonly referred to as a hybrid-cloud. In this case some information is housed onsite, while less sensitive or only backup information is sent to a co-location.

The most popular shift in the Platform as a Service model has been database technology such as Microsoft Share Point. This shift releases storage space as well as allowing you to arrange your data in multiple

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searchable and functional capacities. Industry specific platforms have also been making the move to the cloud. Security and accessibility remain key concerns when utilizing the cloud in this capacity.

Application software has changed mobile technology forever. I don't think technology will ever look back from the capabilities of applications utilized on lap tops, pads or smart phones. From a business standpoint everything from productivity suites to CRM's can now be operated from and stored in the cloud. Accessibility from virtually anywhere is the primary business benefit, as touted in Microsoft Office 365 commercials. Security is a major concern when dealing with access from any mobile device, and Industry specific regulations may limit use of this technology.

Combining all of these layers the evolution of cloud technology can move your network from a static/on-premise solution to a dynamic/hosted infrastructure freeing up your IT team to focus on service and development.

So do I have to go Cloud?

The beauty of the cloud is it can be as la carte as you'd like. Virtually no business with an established infrastructure can wipe the slate clean and start over in the cloud. Nor does a full cloud solution fit the needs of most businesses. Cloud solutions do fit the ever increasing model of seeing IT as a service as opposed to system. This emerging model has allowed companies to state their IT expectations, requirements and service level needs to service providers as opposed to hiring internal IT staff.

The Cloud may be the Buzz word in IT but mostly the cloud is a collection of new technologies that can improve the way your IT operates. The Cloud is the freedom of flexibility, choice and service.



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