

A CLOUD PRIMER: DEMYSTIFYING THE CLOUD
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IT Solutions and Services



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The cloud is more or less a sexy word for the Internet… or at least a recent iteration of the Internet. Anyone who has ever used a hosted email server such as Gmail has already had sensitive data stored in the cloud. Cloud-based email hosting was one of the first and most broadly adopted cloud services on both the personal and professional level. If you use social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin or Instagram, you are already part of the public cloud.

SO WHAT IS THIS CLOUD?

Let's describe the cloud without any technical lingo. Picture a really cramped office space. You and a few co-workers sit in tight quarters with messy desktops buried in mounds of files and paperwork. There is absolutely no room for storage, and it will be years before you can afford a larger office space.Your building manager offers to rent you an empty file cabinet in the basement. Although the basement space is shared with other tenants, only you and your team will have a key to this locked file cabinet to store and retrieve files as you wish. Your rent is relatively cheap compared to other tenants since you're only paying for the file cabinet and not the larger storage areas they are renting.

Another analogy commonly used is the public utility. Obviously, no one would expect you to power your home or business with your very own

electrical plant. The costs would be enormous and the maintenance impossible. Consequently, you and others within the same grid share in the overall cost of the infrastructure to generate and transmit electric power to your home. Being part of the grid enables us all to have access to affordable power based on our usage--just as the cloud makes business solutions that were once only affordable to large enterprises possible by spreading costs across a network of users and charging only for actual usage. This is what makes the cloud work. Small firms can have the technology they need while benefitting from the economies of scale once reserved for the largest firms.

Suddenly those once cluttered desktops are cleared, leaving you with actual physical space to work. This is close to what the cloud does for the back end of small business IT infrastructure.

THE CLOUD IS A TECHNOLOGY EQUALIZER

Historically, the technology used by larger companies has never been available to smaller businesses. Most SMBs have neither the hardware budget nor internal support to "own" a massive internal network infrastructure.

Previously, only large organizations could invest in IT infrastructure. Now, the cloud truly democratizes computing and levels the playing field. In many ways, it is the great equalizer, giving companies of any size the ability to store information at a remote data center rather than on premise. It gives small businesses the ability to do large scale business at a lower cost.

WHY USE THE CLOUD?

Reduced costs: Significant savings can be achieved since the cloud's mass scale computing minimizes onsite physical storage hardware and internal IT staffing.

Anytime, anywhere access: Since data access is no longer restricted to a solitary employee or physical device, users can access, share and collaborate in the cloud whenever and from wherever they please.

Better collaboration: The cloud is available on-demand to computers and other devices from any location at any point in time. This allows for better collaborative efforts among teams working in today's increasingly dispersed mobile workforce. Today, anyone can share data and collaborate across their organization.

Greater scalability: Cloud-based services offer greater flexibility to scale IT needs up or down as the varying business environment demands.

Faster deployment: Cloud-based services can be deployed within just an hour or a few days rather than the weeks or months it takes to strategically plan, buy, build, and implement an internal IT infrastructure.

Environmental friendliness: The cloud's energy efficiency is attractive to any company that is conscientious about the environment and wants to be "greener." The Berkeley Lab conducted a six month study which determined that shifting 86 million U.S. office workers to the cloud reduced energy usage by 87 percent. That is enough electricity to power the city of Los angeles for one year.

Improved security: Although many firms cite security as a reason for their reluctance to move to the cloud, there are actually very few data breaches involving cloud providers. A significant portion of data breaches are due to lost, stolen, or discarded devices and paper records, rogue employees, and human error. Data in the cloud may actually be more secure than data stored on computers, laptops, and company servers, with their array of security vulnerabilities. Unlike a laptop, the cloud can't be left behind in a hotel

lobby. Most smaller and medium sized businesses cannot secure their data centers without the advanced tools, encryption methods, testing, and third party certifications used by cloud service providers.

CONTACT DETAILS

Shail Udawat
Cognilinks
Email: sudawat@cognilinks.com
Phone: 609-788-3355
http://cognilinks.com

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