

Enjoy the freedom of 'Cloud Computing'



Cloud computing may sound a bit scary – it's not really!

All it means is that your computing applications and data are hosted out on the Internet (the 'cloud'), instead of on your own computer or office-based server.

In fact many people already use cloud computing without even realising it – Facebook, Google's suite of Apps and webmail like Hotmail are all examples of cloud computing because the applications and data are not stored on your computer but are stored in data centres accessed over the Internet.

Top 7 benefits

1 Leading software

With cloud computing, small businesses can gain access to the same cloud based software used by major enterprises. Key business applications are available as cloud based solutions from a wide range of providers – applications such as finance systems, customer relationship management (CRM), enterprise resource planning (ERP), as well as everyday applications like email, word processing and spreadsheets.

2 Scalable

Because you buy the solution on a 'per-user' basis, setting up the software won't cost you the earth. And, as your business grows, expanding is easy – you just need to buy access for the new users.

3 Maintenance

Take away the headaches and costs of looking after your software, managing regular upgrades and maintaining a local server – cloud based solutions get upgraded, managed and supported as part of the service.

4 Flexible working

Businesses enjoy huge benefits when working more flexibly – take a look at our flexible working factsheet or www.flexible-working.org to find out more. With a cloud solution, you will have access to the same data you see in your office from any connected device anywhere – smart phones, tablets, laptops – giving you and your employees the freedom to work even more flexibly.

5 Backups

Not everyone backs up their data regularly and stores it off site just in case – but they know they should! With a cloud based solution, all the data is backed up regularly, so you will know your data is always safe.

6 Security

With remote back up, robust antivirus protection, secure access and the reassurance that you'll always be using the latest software, you should feel confident in having your data hosted in the cloud. If you are worried about data storage and security, you could address your concerns to any potential supplier that you are considering.

7 Carbon Savings

The flexibility that cloud computing gives you will help with your approach to flexible working, helping you to reduce business and commuter travel. Not only that, studies have shown that cloud systems are far more energy efficient than running your own power hungry servers, further reducing your carbon footprint.

"We now run many of our business management systems in the cloud, including our in-house ERP system, our CRM system and our marketing automation systems. It means our teams in St Austell and Bristol can work more coherently together and our business can increase productivity. The team meets up on video calls through Skype and shares the same information, without having to travel."



Matt Franks, Fluid Branding



Example Cloud applications

Note: This is far from an exhaustive list. Many applications cover a wide range of functionality, so do your research to find out what is best for your business.

Finance systems

Systems to keep track of your bottom line, e.g. Sage, Oracle

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Systems to manage your contacts and sales processes, e.g. Salesforce, Act and SouthwestCRM

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)

Systems to manage all your resources in an integrated way, e.g. SAP, Microsoft Dynamics, NetSuite

Normal office systems

Email, calendar, contacts, word processing and spreadsheets, e.g. Microsoft Office 365, Google Docs

Communication

Systems for Internet telephony (VOIP), e.g. Swyx, IP Cortex, video conferencing (e.g. Skype, FaceTime) and other business class services, and web conferencing, e.g. Webex

Collaboration tools

To work on the same data across the team, e.g. Huddle, Sharepoint

Back up, file sharing and hosting

e.g. Amazon Web Services, Dropbox, MacMate

Further info

Top Tips

Use proper project management techniques to plan your data migration to the cloud. Think about which parts of the business can move across easily, and weigh up the benefits of doing it a bit at a time compared with a 'big bang' approach.

Try before you buy! You should be able to try out different cloud based solutions with a free trial, so you can explore the pros and cons of each, and check out the support offered.

Do a proper costs/benefits analysis so you can see whether it makes sense for you.

Often you will find that your software solutions do not fit existing business processes perfectly – this is an opportunity to reassess and see whether you could be working more efficiently.

Think about your use of cloud computing as part of your overall ICT strategy – where do you want your business to be in a few years' time and how can ICT help you achieve these aims?

This could mean a whole new way of working so manage the change carefully, making sure staff get proper training on the new systems.

Although the continuity of your business in the event of a problem will be more straightforward, make sure you have a plan if the Internet is down – a backup connection or location you can work from.

Pay as you go schemes like the Adobe Cloud, where you can use high end software for a short period of time without buying the full package, could be more cost effective.

Superfast Business Cornwall is a fully funded service to support eligible businesses to understand, adopt and exploit digital technologies. The service offers all businesses in Cornwall access to guides, top tips, case studies, videos and more in its Technology Knowledge Bank at www.sfbcornwall.co.uk/knowledge-bank



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