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What I Think About the Cloud

By Chris Cote, President BCS

I'm sure most of you have heard about the "cloud" as it relates to computers. Microsoft has been running it's "To the Cloud!" commercials for months, and recently Apple has rolled out its iCloud service.

Simply put, the cloud is the internet. Of course, while the internet isn't new, the cloud is a loosely defined term that refers to new ways of using the internet.

One cloud product that we've been recommending for years is online backup, which backs up server data to a server on the internet. Another more recent product is online email which refers to email services run remotely instead of on a local server. We've been deploying this solution for over a year now and are very happy with the results (See p3).

Two cloud products that you may have heard of are Microsoft's Office 365 and Google Docs. Both are alternatives to Microsoft's industry leading Office productivity suite. In both cases, applications such as Word or Excel are run in a web browser like Internet Explorer, instead of installing software on your workstation. For the most part, the software is running on a remote server instead of on your PC.

It seems easy enough; just open up your web browser and off you go. Oh, if it were that simple. Neither Google or Microsoft claim their cloud products can compete on a feature basis with traditional products such as Microsoft Office. Microsoft describes the online editing ability as "basic"¹, and a recent comparison of the Microsoft and Google offerings showed that the Google products were even less capable. For professional use, Microsoft offers a bundle that includes a copy of Office for the desktop.

For educational use, Microsoft offers a special version for qualified institutions called live@edu. Since BCS is certified through Microsoft's Authorized Educational Reseller program, we can provide great discounts for schools.

There are other considerations as well: companies that use the cloud heavily should consider an additional internet connection to provide a failover in case their primary connection goes down. Older, slower internet connections will need to be upgraded. Older network equipment may also need to be upgraded.

Earlier in my career, I worked on software that controlled machines for the semiconductor industry. My boss and I used to debate on where the software should run. He thought it should run on a remote computer and I thought it should run on controllers inside the machine. In this case, I prevailed. In order for the machine to run properly, the computing power needed to be close to devices it was controlling. I believe cloud computing is a great benefit to our clients, but it doesn't replace the software we all run on our desktops. PCs are so useful primarily because they put computing power in the hands of the individual. The cloud doesn't change that, but does in fact enhance it, and we at BCS are always striving to provide the best tools available for the user, including cloud computing.

Alternative Economic Indicators:

Retailers see 11th-hour surge in holiday sales

NEW YORK (CNMoney) -- It may not be over yet, but retailers are breathing a sigh of relief and celebrating a successful holiday season, thanks to a last-minute surge in sales.

Online sales during the final week before Christmas hit \$2.8 billion, up 16% from last year, according to ComScore, while mall shoppers spent about \$44 billion in the week ending Dec. 24, a 14.8% increase over the same week in 2010, according to Shopper-Trak, which tracks foot traffic at malls and stores.



Retail Sales—5 Year Trend

Home building spikes higher

NEW YORK (CNMoney) -- Home building spiked up in November to the strongest level in almost two years, as record-low mortgage rates and a surge in apartment and condo construction lifted activity.

Housing starts shot up to an annual rate of 685,000 in the month, up 9.3% from October and 24.3% higher than a year earlier. Building activity easily topped predictions of 627,000 starts economists surveyed by Briefing.com were expecting.

Auto sales on pace for big rebound

NEW YORK (CNMoney) -- After a grim couple of years, auto sales finally began to rev up a bit in 2011.

Light vehicle sales for 2011 -- including cars, trucks and SUVs marketed to consumers -- will hit nearly 12.8 million, according to industry research firm TrueCar.com. That's up from 11.6 million last year and is the highest annual total since the 13.2 million vehicles sold in 2008. TrueCar expects the recovery to continue into next year, when it projects that 13.8 million vehicles will be sold.

The Americas, Not the Middle East, Will Be the World Capital of Energy

<http://www.foreignpolicy.com/> For half a century, the global energy supply's center of gravity has been the Middle East. This fact has had self-evidently enormous implications for the world we live in -- and it's about to change.

By the 2020s, the capital of energy will likely have shifted back to the Western Hemisphere. Geologists have long known that the Americas are home to plentiful hydrocarbons trapped in hard-to-reach offshore deposits, on-land shale rock, oil sands, and heavy oil formations. The U.S. endowment of unconventional oil is more than 2 trillion barrels, with another 2.4 trillion in Canada and 2 trillion-plus in South America -- compared with conventional Middle Eastern and North African oil resources of 1.2 trillion.

Small Businesses Plan to Increase Hiring

(NY Times) Jan 2, 2011 - Some good news in the job market: Small businesses plan to increase hiring, according to the latest report from the National Federation of Independent Business.

The organization — an industry group for small and medium-size businesses — conducts a survey each month on subjects like optimism, credit conditions and jobs. November's survey showed that the net share of companies that were planning to hire workers was at its highest in 38 months. The share is well below where it has been in previous recoveries, but is an improvement nonetheless.

Wall Street Ends Back Where It Started

(NY Times) December 30, 2011—Like a roller coaster returning to the platform, the stock market in the United States ended the last day of trading in 2011 just about where it started the year. But what a wild ride it was in between.

The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index, the main gauge of broad market performance, closed on Friday at 1,257.60, finishing the year nearly dead even with its 2010 close of 1,257.64, which is technically down 0.003 percent. The Dow Jones industrial average of 30 blue-chip American stocks fared better, closing the year with a 5.5 percent gain at 12,217.56.

Despite the bruising it took in 2011, Wall Street managed to score one of the better global performances. Major European and Asian indexes lost anywhere from 6 percent (Britain) to 26 percent (Italy) for 2011.

Looking ahead, some analysts see the United States faring even better in 2012. Binky Chadha, the chief strategist for Deutsche Bank, who forecast that the S. & P. 500 would end closer to 1,500 in 2012, wrote in a market commentary that "very healthy" corporate fundamentals and cheap valuations would help equities eventually win out over the euro crisis and American fiscal issues.

Product Highlight: BCS Cloud Exchange

If there is one cloud service that I would recommend above all others, with the exception of online backup, is our Cloud Exchange product.

Most of you are probably asking, what is “Exchange” and why should I be interested. Exchange is the name of Microsoft’s email system that many of you have likely been running in house for many years. It’s a system that runs on a server that stores all your incoming and outgoing email, so that you can access it from anywhere including an internet browser, smart phone, tablet, or Microsoft Outlook that you are probably running on your pc. But Exchange does a lot more including calendars, contacts, and tasks.



Because Exchange runs on a server, you can do a lot of really useful things with it including sharing and collaboration. For example, you can share your calendar with your fellow employees so they can schedule a meeting with you when you have free time. Or it can allow an administrator to send out emails on behalf of someone else.

My favorite feature is using Contacts on my smart phone. If I get a call on my phone, I have the ability to type in a name and company and save it as a contact. And since my phone is connected to Exchange, that contact will show up in my Outlook. I can also organize my contacts in Outlook, and those changes will be mirrored to my phone, instantly.

In the past Exchange was usually installed on a server at the customer premises. However online Exchange services now offer the same features as Exchange installed on a locally, and the costs have declined dramatically. And our exchange offering includes huge 25GB mailboxes so you don’t need to constantly delete old emails to keep under the “2 GB” limit.

One benefit to offsite exchange that is often overlooked is the performance increase that our clients see in their internet speed. Why? Because an offsite email system will filter almost all the spam before it gets to your office; and that’s over 90% of the emails now being sent out. Your internet connection no longer has to transmit this unwanted email traffic to your server, and your server no longer has to filter it.

Be sure to give us a call if you believe your company can benefit from offsite Exchange.

We Love Referrals:

Can we buy you dinner and send you to the movies?
How about make a donation to your favorite charity in your name? Earn rewards for referring new customers to BCS.

BCS Loaner Program:

Did you know that BCS offers equipment for free loan to our Managed Services clients such as:

1. LCD Projector
2. 24 Port Switch
3. Netbook
4. Conference Room (seats 6)

Technology News:

Two new iPads due next month, report says

Dec 22 (CNet)

The iPad rumor mill is spawning twins.

According to DigiTimes, Apple will unveil two versions of its next-generation tablet next month at the Macworld|iWorld conference. Sources at Apple's supply chain partners tell the blog that the new models will target the mid- and high-end markets, while the existing iPad 2 will be positioned to compete with the Amazon Kindle Fire.

The new models will sport 9.7-inch screens instead of the 7.85-inch screen the Taipei-based tech blog reported two weeks ago that the new tablet would "likely" launch with. The screens will reportedly feature QXGA resolution and dual light bars to strengthen panel brightness.

Windows Phone Marketplace hits 50,000-app mark

by Josh Lowensohn December 27, 2011 2:20 PM PST

Nearly a year and two months after its launch, Microsoft's Windows Phone Marketplace has hit a new milestone. The collection of apps and games that run on Microsoft's Windows Phone devices now sits north of 50,000 applications, according to a count by the blog All About Windows Phone. More than a third of those were added in the past three months, and nearly 16 percent within the past 30 days, the site said.

First Apple TVs to come this summer at 32 and 37 inches?

by Marguerite Reardon December 27, 2011 8:04 AM PST

Rumors of Apple TV sets have been swirling for months. And the Taiwanese publication DigiTimes added to the mix today, with word that its supplier sources say Apple is ordering components to build 32-inch and 37-inch TVs that should go on sale in the second half of 2012.

Company IT Spending Forecasts Brighten

By Roy Harris, cfoworld.com

Strong third-quarter corporate spending on technology continued to surprise experts, as Maven Wave Partners measured a 2% increase from Q2 spending levels. The consulting firm had been expecting about a 5% decrease. The strength of recent results also suggests continued upswings in 2012, it said.

Can't Find the Bathroom? Just Ask Google

TechNewsWorld 12/02/11 5:00 AM PT

Users of Google (Nasdaq: GOOG) Maps are already accustomed to relying on the technology for directions to places like the airport or mall, but now they can also use it for help getting around inside once they've arrived.

Verizon says fixed third December service outage

(Reuters) - Verizon Wireless said on Thursday that it had resolved an "issue" with its high-speed wireless network overnight, after its third widely reported problem in a month.

The country's biggest wireless service did not give any details about the problem but said phone call and text message services were not disrupted for high-speed fourth generation (4G) customers and that its older third generation (3G) service was operating normally.

LG Display plant in eastern China hit by strike

BEIJING/SEOUL | Wed Dec 28, 2011 8:25am EST

(Reuters) - Workers at an LG Display factory in eastern China have gone on strike, halting some production, the company said on Wednesday, in the latest action by China's increasingly assertive workforce.

A spokeswoman in Seoul for the South Korean company, Claire Ohm, confirmed the labor dispute after an earlier report by the New York-based China Labor Watch, which said the strike began on Monday, triggered by rancor over year-end bonuses workers say favor South Korean staff.

"Some of our production has been suspended", Ohm said about the Nanjing plant.

Micron shares skyrocket, investors bet on 2012 bounce

Thu Dec 22, 2011 11:58am EST

(Reuters) - Micron Technology Inc's shares jumped 15 percent on Thursday after investors looked past limp quarterly results and focused on a potential 2012 rebound in long-stagnant memory chip demand and prices.