

How Small to Medium-Sized Businesses Can Leverage the Cloud in Secure, Money-Saving Ways

A White Paper by CMIT Solutions



1. With every day that passes, cloud computing becomes an even more integral part of our technological lives.

Now that it's so standard, does cloud computing still represent the revolutionary answer to all of our problems? Or is it simply another useful IT solution that, when utilized properly and implemented cautiously, can benefit your business with secure, money-saving advantages? The benefits are clear, though. Imagine having access to your most important data from any device. That's the promise of cloud services: connect from anywhere with your laptop, smartphone, or tablet. Whether you realize it or not, nearly everyone uses the cloud. Have a Gmail or Yahoo account? You're on the cloud. Use Facebook or LinkedIn? You're on the cloud. Own a smartphone or tablet? You're on the cloud. But as more services shift to the cloud, the reliability, security, and quality of the networks they rely on become more important. And reliability isn't just based on a good Internet connection. A device can run slow, an application can crash, even a data center can go down — any of these links in the chain can fail. For the average user, that's no big deal; so what if your latest Facebook update doesn't go through immediately? For a small to medium-sized business that places all its trust in technology, network unreliability is an unacceptable business cost. So questions surrounding the cloud still abound

2. Which cloud service should you use?

Hundreds of different providers are angling for your attention: hosted email, unified communications, file sync and share, online storage. CMIT Solutions understands that many of those providers will be here today and gone tomorrow. Which is why we only work with proven industry leaders who are committed to the cloud for the long haul. That means we can help you make the right long-term choice for your business.

3. Will your data be protected?

Data loss can affect anyone. And if you're not performing regular, remote cloud-based backups of your information, disaster is likely to strike. Luckily, the cloud does more than just streamline your business processes — it can also provide the secure, encrypted backup backbone you need to thrive. Free or low-cost consumer cloud storage options like Dropbox and Jungle Disk offer high levels of usability but low levels of security unless paired with encryption tools like Jetico, BoxCryptor, or Symantec.

What are the pros and cons of the cloud for your industry?

Just because the cloud is popular doesn't mean it's right for your business. CMIT Solutions specializes in identifying the right solutions to match your needs. Maybe that's a hybrid mix of on-site servers with cloud storage. Maybe it's cloud hosting, which allows for flexible access to computing resources and servers in a pay-as-you-grow environment. Maybe it's dedicated cloud infrastructure. Whatever the answer, we can help you find the affordable, scalable, and reliable way to implement it.

5. What are the benefits of the cloud that can immediately help my business?

Simply moving a server out of a closet to a data center in the sky doesn't seem like that much of a great leap forward. Or is it? Cloud-based computing means that your server — the cloud server — is now located in a world-class data center. That means you have redundant network paths, power sources, servers with failover, data storage with RAID storage arrays, and a host of other technical bells and whistles at your disposal. Did your laptop die? Good thing your files are hosted in the cloud. Smartphone crash? Fire up another device and get right back to work.

Or, to put it another way, the benefit of the cloud is that you have traded in your single, lone server for a slice of a much larger enterprise-class server, with all the protection and redundancy that Fortune 500 companies have enjoyed for years. At CMIT Solutions, we're passionate about bringing such high-level solutions to the small and medium-sized business space.

In addition, our cloud services deliver more comprehensive infrastructure, unparalleled redundancy, easy access, and the flexibility to scale on demand. But don't forget network bandwidth — it matters more than ever when using the cloud, and expanding to meet demand might eat into any cost savings that adoption of the cloud might achieve.



CLOUD STATISTICS

- Google Apps now has more than 50 million users, including 5 million businesses
- 60% of businesses now utilize the cloud for IT operations
- Microsoft Office 365 passed the one-million-user mark in just 100 days
- 82% of companies reportedly saved money after moving to the cloud
- Cloud usage will grow from 6% of the application market in 2012 to 65% by 2020
- 2014 marked the first year that more than 50% of IT workloads were located on the cloud
- The cost of cloud storage has dropped by upwards of 50% as adoption of the technology increases
- By 2015, end-user spending of the cloud is expected to be more than \$180 billion
- An estimated 1 exabyte of data is stored in the cloud — that's equivalent to 10,000,000 copies of the US Library of Congress' printed collection
- Amazon has more than 5 times the cloud computing capacity of the aggregate total of its next 14 biggest competitors



10 Ways to Maximize Cloud Computing for Your Business

1. Hosted email

Sure, free options like Gmail or Yahoo Mail might be sufficient for your personal email use. But a successful small business deserves a higher level of service, security, and support. Hosted email in the cloud offers advanced capabilities, including anti-malware and anti-spam filtering, guaranteed downtime prevention, dedicated data centers, and 24x7 support, that will keep the heartbeat of your business running.

2. File sync and share

Everyone expects immediate access to documents and data, a fact borne out by our primary 2014 research, which found that 70% of small business owners and managers were using some form of file sync and share. But like in the email realm, many of the most popular free options can't satisfy business needs. Enterprise file sync and share solutions look at a much bigger picture: controlling how data is transmitted, who can access it, and its level of security both in transit and while at rest.

3. Online storage and collaboration

This takes file sync and share one step further — think the kind of cloud services that allow for real-time collaboration. Like the email and file sync and share landscapes, enterprise storage and collaboration options offer the most capabilities: defined and time-limited read/write access, two-direction synchronization, conflict resolution in case of competing file versions or naming conventions, and role-based privileges for file creation and editing.

4. Access to cloud servers

Say your company runs intensive accounting processes at the end of each month, which requires three servers to maintain uptime for the entire company. Do you need those three servers in-house every day of the month? Or just available for 8 hours on one day? With the right IT partner, you can utilize the cloud for extra resources — but only when you need them.

5. Unified communications

If any of your employees or co-workers operate remotely or work in the field, unified communications are a must. Defined as the integration of all voice, video, data, and mobile forms of communication, unifying these avenues can do wonders for the streamlining of collaboration, both person to person and in large groups. That can result in more productivity and efficiency — and more satisfied employees who can rely on the cloud to get things done.

6. Remote desktop hosting

For larger companies with more complex needs, remote desktop hosting can take unified communications to the next level. Virtual infrastructures can deliver efficient management from a single console with personal or pooled desktops. And all apps can reside in dedicated data centers to minimize the risk of data loss or compromise.

7. Application hosting

Before the cloud, product packages like Microsoft Office and Adobe Creative Suite came with prohibitive price tags and lengthy installation periods. But today, new SaaS (Software as a Service) options like Office 365 and Creative Cloud allow for the use of critical applications in a cloud-based environment. This can lower initial and recurring costs while also simplifying the upgrade and integration process. Like with unified communications, this can result in more work being completed in less time.

8. Productivity boosters

Whether you're looking for a customer relationship management solution like Salesforce, a document service like DocuSign, a project-tracking interface like Sage One, a user-interactive analysis tool like Adobe Forms, or a thousand other offerings, the cloud probably has what you're looking for to boost productivity.

5. Finance and accounting capabilities

QuickBooks has begun moving to the online SaaS model, but there are plenty of other finance and accounting options that work best in the cloud. Payroll, expense reporting, invoice creation, billable hours, inventory control, client records... it's all available to your business. Best of all, many of today's cloud-based options work far more efficiently than older paper-based or database alternatives.

10. Password management

We all have far too many online accounts with far too many unique passwords that all require different combinations of lowercase and uppercase letters, numbers, and characters. Given the glut of recent data breaches and hacks, those are a must in today's online world. But how do you keep track of them all? The best password managers run on cloud capabilities: browser and toolbar plug-ins, automated form fill, mobile device syncing. You might not think of password management within the cloud realm, but its critical nature makes it a must-have part of any business strategy.

Conclusion

While these 10 different cloud aspects may seem easy to navigate, consider this: last year, Dell identified nearly 125 different cloud solutions that could be beneficial for their enterprise customers. Now imagine trying to navigate that landscape without a trusted IT provider by your side. That's where the expertise of a company like CMIT Solutions comes into play. We have extensive experience deploying cloud solutions for our clients, which range from small to medium-sized companies in every industry across North America.

We take pride in pinpointing the right cloud-based services to meet the needs of your business. Let us be your expert-level advisor who can qualify vendors and lock in the kind of advantageous pricing and elite-level support models you deserve. We understand the complexities of the cloud, and we want to put them to work for your business. Contact us today if you'd like to learn more.

