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Demystifying the Cloud

What it is and why you should care

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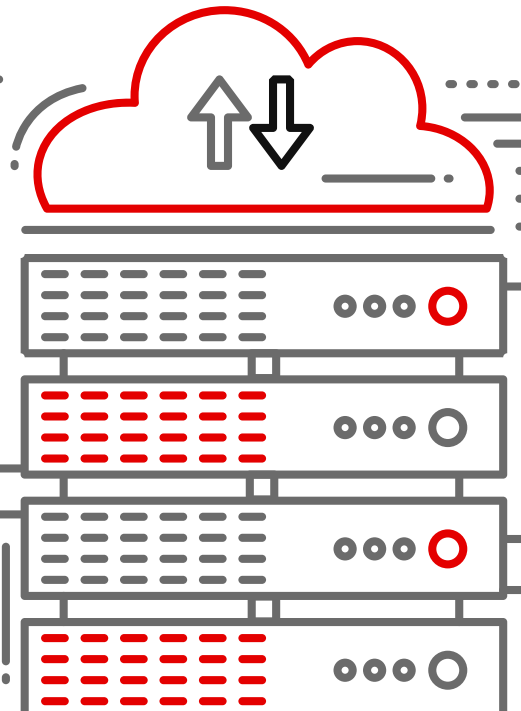
THE CLOUD IS HERE TO STAY

Phrases like "the cloud is the future of technology", "the cloud is revolutionary," and "the cloud will change the way companies run forever" are often thrown around in today's business world, and for good reason. Cloud computing is perhaps the biggest shift the IT industry has experienced since the introduction of the internet, and will create a massive impact in the sector for the foreseeable future.

A recent survey of Tech Chief Financial Officers by Forbes showed that 74% believed cloud computing had the most measurable impact on their business. And in a report by Spiceworks, over one-third of companies reported moving to the cloud to reduce the support burden on IT staff -- these are big numbers. The report also shows that these numbers are expected to rise as more business owners and decision-makers turn to the cloud to supp ort their business model and growth.

"With cloud computing, small businesses can get access to the same types of IT services that were previously only available to large enterprises, for an affordable, predictable monthly price."

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SO WHAT IS THE CLOUD?

Cloud computing defined

Recently, there's been a lot of talk about cloud computing, but what does it really mean? In layman's terms, cloud computing is simply a method of storing and accessing data and programs over the internet, as opposed to using the hard drive on your computer for the same purpose. It is a way to utilize a network of computers to store and process information in order to optimize performance.

Why businesses are moving to the cloud

In the past, if you wanted to take your files with you, you would have had to save them to a USB flash drive, external hard drive, or compact disk. But if something were to happen to your portable storage, all your precious data would be at risk of being damaged beyond recovery, or even lost entirely. Saving files to the cloud, however, allows you to access them from wherever, whenever, and from any device that has an internet connection. The cloud makes it possible for you to easily share documents with coworkers or friends, too, allowing for more efficient collaboration.

"Instead of backing up data on site, small businesses can sign up for online backup and disaster recovery services that store and save all their crucial data in a secured and remote location, recoverable at a moment's notice."

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WHAT DOES THE CLOUD LOOK LIKE?

How is your data stored in the cloud?

When you transition your data to the cloud, it has nothing to do with the white, fluffy clouds floating in the sky. What it does mean, is that your data is being stored on a physical server -- usually more than one -- in some far-flung place. This network of servers, most likely maintained by a cloud storage service provider, uses computing power to store data, run applications and deliver services via the internet.

Some cloud computing examples

Cloud computing is everywhere, and it is deeply embedded into our personal and business lives in ways we might not have even considered. It is highly likely that you've already used one, if not many, cloud computing services. Here are just a few:

Google Drive

Google offers a myriad of widely used and popular digital tools, such as Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Google Slides. With Google Drive, you can collaborate with colleagues, and share and sync files online with ease.

Microsoft Office 365

Office 365 from Microsoft gives your business users the ability to share, view and edit documents online in real time, allowing for more productivity, flexibility, and efficiency in the workplace.

Email communication

Cloud computing can be as simple as using web-based applications to send emails. Using a cloud-hosted email solution gives you the opportunity to access your emails from any place in the world.

Backup services

With cloud computing, backing up files has never been easier. Instead of saving backups to physical storage devices, users are able to secure their data in well-protected offsite servers, all of which are accessible and restorable via the internet.

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WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT THE CLOUD

If you're like most business owners, you simply don't have the time, budget, or expertise necessary to buy, deploy, and manage the computing infrastructure needed to run business applications on your own. Cloud computing is the 21st-century solution to all these complexities. As a user, you can access all the latest, most advanced programs and web-based applications you need to run your business smoothly.

Still doubt the true power of cloud computing? Honestly consider these compelling benefits, and you might change your mind.

"Cloud computing has leveled the playing field for small businesses to compete against their larger competitors, in terms of IT infrastructure."

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1 MOBILE WORKFORCE

The days when work was confined to a four-wall office with locked doors are long gone. The number of companies that allow their employees to telecommute is on the rise every year, thanks to developments in cloud computing. Here are some ways you can use the cloud to enable a mobile workforce:

Check emails

Email access has never been easier, since messages are stored on servers rather than on a local computer, and are accessible from any device that has an internet connection.

Store files in the cloud

There's no need to bring files stored on USB sticks with you. As long as you have access to the internet, your most important business files are just a few clicks away.

Collaborate online

Through the use of web-based applications that run within browsers, employees are able to share, edit, and sync documents from anywhere, and at any time.

Make notes

Ditch the traditional method of taking notes on paper. With advanced note-taking applications, your files will always be up-to-date, sharable, and accessible on any device.

Working remotely opens up new possibilities for small businesses and countless benefits that are often overlooked by business owners. For one, allowing your staff to work from a location of their choice can enhance productivity by cutting down on travel time and commuting problems for a start.

Employees can work on the move and make use of the many cloud-based business applications in development. And the cloud's ability to enhance collaboration and communication is invaluable to a company, both internally and externally.

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2 SCALABILITY

Scalable user management

One of the key benefits of using the cloud is its scalability. For organizations that have ever-changing computing capacity needs, the cloud offers the ability to seamlessly add or remove user accounts, storage, and memory capacity. For example, if you need to add 10 new users to a system, you can do so in just a few clicks. Reducing the number of users is just as simple.

Flexible plans and pricing

Many cloud service providers offer affordable, pay-as-you-go pricing models, which means you are free to upgrade or downgrade your plan whenever you need to. In effect, you're no longer bound to systems that can only move in one direction, but can instead benefit from technology that grows along with your business and adapts to your evolving requirements.

"One of the biggest advantages of cloud computing is the ability to scale on demand to efficiently handle an influx of traffic and service requests."

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3 BACKUP AND DISASTER RECOVERY

Data loss dilemma

Can you afford to have your business operations halted for days, or even weeks, due to data loss or corruption? Could you withstand a disaster without a proper data backup plan in place? Clued-in business owners know better than anyone that failing to prepare for the loss of their data could cripple their company.

Cloud computing and business continuity

Many companies are now embracing a cloud-based solution to support their disaster recovery schemes, as there are many technical and security benefits. Cloud computing allows for quick data recovery, high availability, and customization, all at a much lower price point than those of most traditional disaster recovery methods.

Here are some of the key benefits you get from backup and disaster recovery in the cloud:

Better data protection

Cloud-based backups ensure that your valuable data is protected with best-in-class encryption, and multiple layers of security.

Ease of use

Most cloud disaster recovery solutions have simple web-based management systems and user interfaces.

Fast setup

Deployment can be done in a matter of minutes with easy-to-use setup and configuration wizards.

Integration with existing IT

Most cloud solutions work seamlessly with existing storage devices, applications, and operating systems.

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4 DATA SECURITY

Security threats are on the rise

The number of cloud users increases every year, and there's no sign of it slowing down. The cloud has become a reliable and trusted place for business users to store their documents and private data. But with all the news about cyber security breaches and information hacking, keeping your data safe has never been more important.

Cloud computing's powerful protection

Reputable cloud service providers have security measures that far exceed those of most small- and medium-sized businesses. These service providers often employ the best engineers and technicians, and utilize optimized infrastructures for superior levels of cloud security.

"Cloud computing ensures maximum data security with strong encryption, secure authentication, and advanced admin control panel."

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5 REDUCED COSTS

Lower IT expenses

The savings companies gain from implementing cloud computing are significant. Investing five or six figures on hardware and software installation, management and maintenance costs can become a thing of the past. Cloud service providers spread the cost of IT equipment over all their clients, bringing down your expenses.

Infrastructure cost isn't the only thing you can save when you opt for the cloud, either. Cloud computing consumes less electricity and takes fewer staff to manage, which translates into lower energy bills, and reduced recruitment and salary costs.

Cloud computing can save money in the long run

It goes without saying that certain IT equipment is prohibitively expensive to buy, manage and maintain. What's more, its value depreciates over time. With the introduction of the cloud, companies have to pay only for what they use, potentially saving them large sums of money in the long term.

The cloud is a game-changer for small businesses. It gives them access to enterprise-level applications at a fraction of the usual cost -- and they don't have to develop, host, and maintain these applications, yet are able to reap all the benefits. The bottom line is: Cloud computing saves money, resources, and time, while also increasing efficiency, productivity, and profitability. Who wouldn't want that?

The cloud is here to stay, the question is: Are you ready to take advantage of this groundbreaking technology? If the answer is an enthusiastic "yes," get in touch with our tech experts today and we'll be happy to show you how.

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Curious how these methods can skyrocket your business's productivity, and even save you money?

Call us today to talk with one of our seasoned consultants. We're happy to answer your questions, provide recommendations, and audit your current IT network.

Request your free consultation today!
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