



Guide

Using cloud technology to support your business



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Cloud computing is becoming a topic of increasing interest for small, medium-sized and large companies alike. According to research by IDC¹, it is forecast that global spend on IT cloud services will increase 126% to over \$107 billion (£64 billion) by 2017. So what is it and what can it do for your business?

Simply put, cloud computing is the use of applications on the internet as an alternative to using software downloaded on an individual computer. It removes the need to buy costly hardware and software licences or to have an in-house IT management team. With cloud technology come a number of advantages, including greater flexibility, efficiency and cost-cutting.

We have compiled this guide to help provide a better understanding of how you can take advantage of cloud technology to support your business.

Reduce costs

Quick and easy to set up, cloud computing demands minimal start-up costs and limited loss of time and productivity. A major benefit is the low and predictable running costs.

Delivering ongoing technical support, a service provider can often replace the assistance provided by an in-house IT department. In addition to this, you only purchase what your business needs, so you are not paying for unnecessary applications and data storage that won't get used. A cloud service provider has the time, resource and skills to maintain the technology, such as security and version updates, leaving you to concentrate on building your business. If you experience fast growth, or choose to downsize, the cloud technology can be quickly and easily adapted to suit you.



The cloud service provider removes the need to pay large, one-off costs for new hardware. Often businesses are offered a pay-as-you-go arrangement, which makes it much easier when planning outgoings based on a fixed budget. Having applications available via the internet also means the business does not need to pay for software licences for multiple applications and users, potentially saving the business significant sums of money.

Increase productivity

It is well documented that employees respond positively to a flexible work environment, resulting in increased productivity and engagement². Making applications such as email, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, invoicing and internal communications available to employees via the web provides a setting where employees are not tied to one desk in one office for a set number of hours. One advantage of this is staff working at different times of the day, unhindered by time zone and geographic location; good news if you run an international corporation or have plans to expand your business abroad.

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Create a level playing field

Cloud technology allows small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) access to state-of-the-art applications that might normally carry a high price tag. Apart from the obvious financial savings that the cloud can offer, it also means SMEs don't need to rely on laborious and complicated processes to back-up or restore data. As a result, cloud users can be more agile and recover from any mishaps at a far quicker pace than any company with in-house servers and software.

Be secure

Anyone who has lost, or has been left with a corrupt laptop or data storage device will appreciate the security that IT cloud services can offer. Data protection is taken care of as all of the business' documents, customer data and passwords are stored safely, meaning you can rest assured that they can still be accessed, despite not having the hardware. With your information held in the cloud, you can access it quickly, minimising downtime and maintaining output.

Getting started

It is not always necessary to go to a cloud service provider to get started, as there are plenty of free applications that you can use to get an idea of how cloud computing can benefit your business. Offerings from the likes of *Google*, *Dropbox*, *Skype* and *PayPal* enable you to share documents, communicate and take customer payments with minimal effort and no cost.



Despite the range of advantages of cloud computing, it is important to point out that no technology comes without its limitations. Before opting to move your business onto a cloud service provider, you should be aware that any technology is prone to technical issues.

A good internet connection is vital to ensure you are not limited by poor network or connection issues. It is also important to understand that while cloud technology holds all your data, thus preventing data loss in instances of lost or broken hardware, conversely you will be trusting sensitive information with a third-party server.

It's clear to see that cloud technology has some excellent benefits in terms of cost effectiveness and business productivity and if you're considering implementation, it could be a great asset to your organisation.

¹International Data Corporation – Sept 2013

²Future of Work Institute 2012

If you're looking for working capital or additional funds to support your business please call Close Brothers Invoice Finance on 0808 149 8672 or visit www.closeinvoice.co.uk