

Cloud computing is a relatively new way of sharing information on the Internet that uses resources on demand. The actual computing network (called “clouds”) can be big or small, public or private, but the bottom line is all of the computers on the network have access to the same applications, services and information. It’s a way of not only sharing information, but resources too.

A person working on a computer in a cloud can access a program within the cloud, without the actual software being installed on the computer he or she is working on. This type of computing method reduces costs, since the cost of the software can be split up among several different networks.

A cloud can be private or public, there are distinct differences between the two. Public cloud computing sells services to the public at large; basically, anyone on the Internet can acquire access to the cloud. A private cloud is a network that hosts applications and services those with authorized access. It’s also possible to have a private cloud within a public cloud by restricting access by implementing a password, for example. These types of clouds are called virtual private clouds, since they actually exist within private clouds.

There are three broad types of cloud computing. Infrastructure as a service (IaaS) is where a company leaves the actual infrastructure and maintenance of the network to an outside party. The service provider is responsible for the maintenance, and the company pays a fee to the service provider for housing the cloud, typically on a per-use basis. Platform as a service (PaaS) involves a customer (person or business) renting out

storage and network capacity for the expressed use of running applications. Software as a service (SaaS) relies on applications being hosted by an outside vendor. Each has inherent benefits and drawbacks, the risk/benefit to your organization is worth discussing with your IT team or trusted IT advisors.

Cloud computing has revolutionized how networks share information with each other. It’s made the process easier than before and becomes more predictable and secure with each passing day. Information integration is much simpler with cloud computing, and the reduced resource burden means that businesses can get vital computing done without the increased costs associated with housing and maintaining network systems.

At the same time, it is revolutionizing business computing and moving the responsibility of keeping your data and systems secure to an outside party; the risks associated with that shift are important to assess. Each organization has different levels of application availability and security needs. Be sure to check the Service Level Agreement provided by the cloud computing services company thoroughly, and review the potential risks with a careful eye.

Keep cloud computing on your list of potential corporate IT strategies and research goals. It can be a great way to save time, money and gain access to services and software that could push your business to the next level. *EM*

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