

Staying Ahead In The Clouds – An Introduction to Cloud Computing

Everyone loves a great buzzword and the world of IT is no different. Cloud Computing is the buzz of the day but what exactly is it. Non-tech decision makers and managers fall into two decidedly different camps when it comes to the cloud, total infatuation or abject terror. All the rage in some quarters Cloud Computing is not always well understood and is neither something to be blindly embraced or reflexively shunned.

Cloud computing is the greatest thing to ever happen in the history of computing, is an often heard quote that is more sales pitch than reality. Migrating to the cloud for at least some of your business needs is likely a viable consideration but deciding what to move and how much to move requires an understanding of what the cloud is and how it functions.

The concepts behind the cloud are not new and find their roots in dumb terminals of the pre-desktop clone days of the late 70's and 80's. The green or preferred amber glow of monitors and keyboards that were slaves to mini-mainframes functioned in a lot of ways like the promise of the cloud does now by hosting not only the data but carrying the burden of the application and serving it on demand to remote users.

The cloud and its many acronyms are built around a common concept and suffix, aaS or As A Service. What comes before the aaS are a variety of prefixes each of which represents an aspect of modern computing and following is a less than comprehensive list.

- **SaaS** Software as a Service
- **STaaS** Storage as a Service
- **DaaS** Data as a Service
- **NaaS** Network as a Service
- **DBaaS** Database as a Service

As a service means that the prefix such as Software is provided to end users as a service rather than as a possession that they own. The software, a word processor for example, is located at a remote location and is accessed by users as needed via the internet. The results of what is created using the word processor SaaS may be stored on the users PC, laptop or other device or stored on the cloud as part of STaaS or Storage as a Service.

The main advantages of the cloud include reduced cost, ease of maintenance and accessibility and a pretty straight forward especially for smaller businesses. The cost of software is reduced greatly because when provided as a service the licensing costs per user are substantially lower than traditional software licensing schemas when it comes to initial outlay.

The cost benefit of Software as a Service via the cloud does not end with licensing costs but continues through to implementation and maintenance. Because your applications are hosted elsewhere and are served to your users the expense of upgrades, patches and

maintenance is shifted to the provider who is able to spread that cost over a larger number of users resulting in a near elimination of expense to the individual user.

Who Controls The Cloud?

The cloud is not a single place it is dispersed it exists across the internet it is everywhere at once. For all its transcendent qualities the cloud is not entirely ethereal either, it exists in physical form in data centers around the world and is controlled by companies like Google, Cisco, Microsoft and a growing number of others.

The cloud is rather like a very elaborate gated community populated with renters. You can bring your furniture in the form of your data and use all of the facilities, applications and storage so long as you pay your rent. The landlord controls access to and from your stuff and provides all the maintenance. Like a townhouse in a gated community the cloud may not be for everyone.