

## **The Cloud**

### **So what's this "Cloud" all about then...?**

*The Cloud is a newly coined term that describes accessing a program or service across the internet. Something you may not know is that the cloud isn't new! For years people have been working remotely from home and accessing email sites such as Hotmail, MSN and Yahoo.*

*Believe it or not accessing these sites is Cloud computing and you are using the internet to get to the resource you need from anywhere in the world. Many big companies such as Amazon, Microsoft and Google run their own Cloud service which allows people to write word documents, spreadsheets and access email from anywhere with an internet connection. All of this is done without installing any software onto your PC or laptop.*

### **How does it work?**

*The Cloud cannot work without the internet and today's high speed broadband has made Cloud computing possible. A good way to illustrate this is using binoculars - imagine your computer is in the next town yet you can still see the screen through your binoculars. You can still control the mouse and keyboard but all of the work is really being done miles away. This is how The Cloud works, the idea being that all the hard work is done elsewhere and not on your own PC or laptop.*

### **What are the real day to day advantages?**

*The Cloud comes into its own for the mobile workforce. Remember the Cloud doesn't care where you are, or who's computer you are using. You can access your files and emails from anywhere.*

*Backups also become a thing of the past as data is stored on data centres across the world. No more nagging to put in your backup tapes or copying your data onto USB stick!*

*Many businesses come to us to ask about the Cloud and the driving force behind this is the low monthly cost. Microsoft's Office 365 service comes in at under £10 per person per month and when you compare this to the price of buying a full version of Microsoft office, it is a tempting offer.*

### **Where is my data actually stored then?**

*When you use the Cloud your emails, files and other data are stored on your provider's data centres. These are huge banks of computers that can store literally millions of files. Whether you are using Microsoft, Amazon or Google as your supplier your data is in their hands!*

*These data centres are now in most countries across the world so pinning down exactly where your data lives is near impossible. Given that these data centres can be in countries where natural disasters are a strong possibility and economic down turn is possible, revealing their locations is not in the suppliers' interest.*

## **What are the downside's to the Cloud?**

*Although for some the Cloud is the utopia they have been looking for, there are downsides that the unsuspecting are not aware of.*

*Remember that the Cloud relies totally on the internet so no internet, no Cloud. Without the internet you won't be able to even view your files or emails.*

*We've all experienced the joy of a computer running at a snail's pace and the Cloud is no different! Imagine running the same programs, but over the internet. You must remember that no matter how quick and how reliable the Cloud is, it will always be slower than using your locally installed programs.*

*Also, do not be fooled by the low monthly cost. Take the example of a thirty-man company we spoke to who were keen on cutting IT costs. Replacing their current server system would cost nearly £7000, yet moving the company to the Cloud would only cost £210 per month! An easy decision at first glance...*

*Bear in mind though that a new server lasts around five years. If we take the monthly cost of the Cloud and multiply it by 60 months we get... £12.6k! It doesn't take a genius to work out there is no cost saving here! However, given the tough economic times we find ourselves in some would rather pay more over all but spread the payments.*

*We've all been in the situation where we have accidentally deleted an email but not noticed for a few months. Often we can get this back from old backups we have or from the company tape backup system. There is a big difference with the Cloud. Depending on the provider, emails and data are only kept for a very short time after they have been deleted. If keeping your data safe is critical, you need to seriously consider this.*

*We've all heard that the Cloud boasts stability and high up time, which is true. However, the sacrifice here is that you lose the ability to customise an office-based system. Simple tasks such as sending and receiving from different email accounts, setting up distribution groups and archiving data are just not possible with the Cloud. While this may not be an issue for some we have had customers return from the Cloud back to an internal system for this reason alone.*

*Another issue that is dismissed by many Cloud suppliers is the issue of data safety. The Data centres where your files sit are under the jurisdiction of the hosting country. Do not assume because you live and work in the UK that this is where your data is stored. Data is bound by the hosting countries laws and regulations, this may or may not affect your business but it needs to be considered. In a real morbid view the possibility of a natural disaster must be taken into account when data is kept "out of sight".*

	The Cloud	Office Based Server System
Cost	Over 5 years £10,500 for up to 25 users. Or pay monthly for £7 / user / month	Over 5 years £7000 for up to 25 users or monthly this would work out at £4.60
Up Time and Reliability	Totally dependent on your internet connection. If your internet is slow then your communication with the Cloud will suffer. The back end of the Cloud is however very reliable.	High up time with easier accessibility in a disaster or internet down situation.
Performance	Dependant on internet connection	Fast
Customisation	Limited	Highly configurable
Support	Direct from Cloud supplier – we all know dealing with larger companies can be hard work, and in our experience Cloud support is no different. Often only a dedicated technical contact is allowed to log calls.	Often server systems are dealt with by local suppliers who you know and trust.
Security	Highly secure but your data is stored in an unknown location and transmitted across the internet at all times.	Highly secure and physically accessible in a disaster.
Data Backup	Managed by the Cloud supplier with minimal time to recover a file/email should it have been deleted.	Configured in a way that suits you, including monthly rotations and continuous backups run by the server.
Communication	Phone connections cost extra and are often unsupported.	Any phone or device can be connected.
Accessibility	Access all your data from anywhere in the world.	Access all your data from anywhere in the world. Access colleges data from anywhere in the world.

**In Summary:**

	Cloud Solution	In House Server Solution
Data held in a secure data centre	Yes	
Pay monthly	Yes	
Remote access to data	Yes	Yes
Customise for different types of user		Yes
Unlimited email storage		Yes
Unlimited files storage		Yes
Remotely access office computers and LOB (Line of Business) applications		Yes
Local IT Support		Yes
Self-administered	Yes	Yes
Third Party Administered		Yes
Supplier Administered	Yes	
Accessible offline (With no internet connection)		Yes
Integrate Office Applications with local applications		Yes
Free software upgrades	Yes	

