

Cloud Computing Pluses

Microsoft and a large number of other software companies are leading the transition to cloud computing. Cloud computing has several advantages over conventional computing but it has some disadvantages as well. Whether it makes sense for an individual client depends on a variety of circumstances.

Traditionally, software was always purchased in full and then installed on as many computers as required. This often involved substantial upfront costs for both the software and the installation. Similarly, when the software was upgraded, someone would need to upgrade the server and or client copies to update to the new version. This could take a substantial amount of time to complete, so companies often postponed useful upgrades because of the sheer amount of work involved.

Enter Cloud Computing, where the software you use is not installed on your computer but rather resides on the Internet. As long as you have an Internet Connection and an up to date browser, like Internet Explorer, you can run a web based application. In place of purchasing the software outright, you simply pay a monthly license fee per computer. This monthly fee typically includes upgrades which are performed automatically by Microsoft or whatever company supplies your web based application, so you do not have to invest any time to upgrade. In some cases licensing is even based on total concurrent users so you only have to pay for the number of users accessing the application at the same time.

Another plus for Cloud Based computing is that you usually do not have to invest in substantial file servers or other assorted IT infrastructure to run it. Thus for some companies it can be a good fit where minimizing IT costs is a consideration. Data can also be housed out on the Internet where the application provider backs up your data.

Cloud Computing Minuses

On the downside, Cloud Computing is obviously Internet dependant. If the Internet goes down you cannot run the application. To get around this, companies employ special routers that support dual Internet suppliers. You could combine a DSL line and Cable for example so that if one service went down, the router would automatically switch to the other supplier to maintain your application access.

Similar to leasing a car over a 5 year period, your monthly fees may outweigh the initial cost of buying the software and having it installed. This is obviously advantageous to the software supplier in that they have a constant stream of revenue and only need support a single version of their software as everyone is upgraded on a regular basis.

This may, on the downside, require that you retrain staff every couple of years as new versions are rolled out dependant on the degree of changes in each new upgrade. Since technical support is generally included in the monthly fees, this helps reduce this impact somewhat. Companies often create on-line training materials to help with this transition.

The subject of on-line data out on the internet is another subject altogether. When data resides on your own servers you must create a backup regimen that can protect the data. This gives you some degree of control over the level of protection you implement. It is expected that on-line data is similarly protected, but you often have no easy way to confirm this. To minimize this risk make sure that the software supplier provides some form of backup that you can do to download your data to an internal storage device as well.

Like it or not, Cloud Computing is here to stay and some software, like Microsoft Exchange Server, is being phased out in favour of the new Office 365 Cloud Based email solution.