Cloud Computing for Business
Is It Right For You?
So you want to move to the cloud?

Cloud computing is a huge buzz word in the industry right now, and a lot of businesses are feeling compelled to move their business networks in that direction to “keep ahead of the curve”. There are many advantages to cloud solutions and it’s a great fit for many businesses. There are also some notable limitations that make it ‘not-a-fit’ for every business or circumstance. In these few pages, we’ll explore some of the key benefits to cloud computing, some of the limitations, and the importance of a migration plan.

A little background

So before we jump into our discussion about the cloud it’s important to have a better understanding of what “cloud” actually means. Really, it’s a very general term that has been used by marketers to describe a variety of data center solutions. What that means, is that for most of these cloud solutions, they’ve taken the servers out of your office and put them in a datacenter.

They typically also ensure that the data and applications housed in the datacenter is accessible from anywhere on any device. All of the actual computing work is taking place on the server in the datacenter and the device you’re using to access it essentially becomes a ‘dumb-terminal’ or ‘thin-client’. It simply displays the data that is housed on the server and does not control or manipulate the data itself.
For those that have been around for a while, this may sound familiar. Cloud computing is actually not a new idea at all. It hearkens back to the days of main-frame computing, where there was one massive room sized computer that did all of the thinking and multiple terminals attached to it that users could access data.

The term cloud is widely used to encompass a variety of different services. It includes web based software as a service applications, hosted server solutions, hosted file sharing solutions, hosted applications, hosted email solutions and much more. There are important factors to consider when vetting whether these solutions are the best fit for your business.

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**Key Benefits**

**Savings**
Depending on the specific computing and network needs of your business, you may discover the cloud model provides significant cost savings over a more traditional hardware/software model. The savings for this model are usually achieved on upfront capital
expenditure for server and network infrastructure, and potentially on support costs. Support costs are generally achieved in cloud computing when all of the data can be centralized in the data center, and applications housed there. This allows upgrades and maintenance to be done in a single location instead of on hundreds of individual endpoints.

**Improve Accessibility and collaboration**
One of the key benefits of cloud computing is that it is available anywhere you have an internet connection and in most cases from any device. This allows you to offer greater flexibility and work life balance to your employees. It also allows them to be more productive when they’re on the go and out of the office, allowing collaboration with team members any place on the map.

**Scalability**
Another great feature of cloud computing is the ability to scale your computing solution up or down seamlessly as your company continues to grow or change. This can offer cost savings with a just-in-time delivery model as well as allows you to scale rapidly to meet spikes in demand or seasonal needs. It gives you the flexibility to change direction without many of the costs that would typically be involved in scaling your infrastructure.
Redundancy and Physical Security
Having your data protected in a datacenter offers many advantages that you wouldn't have otherwise. Datacenters have an abundance of physical security and multi-factor authentication that makes it very difficult for unauthorized persons to gain access. They also have redundant power connected to multiple grids with backup generators. There are redundant heating and cooling systems that keep all of the equipment at the correct temperatures. Multiple internet connections from different carries give you peace of mind that your equipment will always be up and available.

Limitations
Cloud computing has a lot of important advantages but it's not a perfect fit for every business and every situation. Every solution has its costs. Cloud computing typically gives you a monthly cost instead of a large upfront expense. The only catch is that monthly is ongoing forever. Sometimes this model financially isn't a fit for every business. There are also cost to migrate your data to the cloud that frequently aren't
calculated into the cost equation. Frequently cloud solutions can save you money upfront, but sometimes will cost more when looked at over five years.

All cloud solutions are reliant on a good connection to the internet. If you have employees in the field or in remote office locations where their internet is sketchy at best, a cloud solution may not be a good fit for your business.

Data Control: There are some businesses that are highly regulated and need to have total control of their data at all times for security and data integrity purposes. The cloud might not be a good fit for these organizations.

Graphics and Intensive Database Work: Some business that do 3D design work or that use custom applications that are database intensive might want to think twice about the cloud. These items can typically be moved to the cloud, but the cost is so significant in many cases that the numbers won't work out in your favor.

**Migration Plan**

Any major change to a business network needs to be done with care so that your productivity and bottom line are not affected. It's important to do a careful evaluation of all of pros and cons before moving forward as mentioned above, to ensure that the change will be a positive one. It's also critical to have the proper resources on staff, or connect with a qualified 3rd party, that can assist with a migration plan.

**FACT:**

Cloud Computing is up to 40 times more cost effective for an SMB, compared to running its own IT system.

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Once the decision has been made to make the move to the cloud, a thorough evaluation of all hardware, network requirements and application specific requirements should be made. Ensure that all of your needs are accounted for before the work begins and have a timeline with planned downtime where you can make the needed changes with minimal impact.

A qualified cloud partner will be able to consult with you on all of these factors and offer solid commonsense advice. They should also be able to evaluate your network before the change is made and let you know if there is a reason that it’s not a good idea.

Is Your Business Ready For The Cloud?
Cloud Computing for Business is certainly a great opportunity for your company to improve certain processes, streamline certain business applications and maybe even save a little money in the process. However, doing so hastily could be more trouble than it’s actually worth and set your business back.

You need to speak with qualified cloud solutions specialists about how much of the cloud is useful for your business and specific business needs. Contacting i.t.NOW’s team of cloud solutions experts can help you make that decision.

FACT:
52% of companies reported increased data efficiency and utilization.
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