



## Cloud Computing:

### PRO

- **Status** - Small market penetration but growing fast
- **Attraction** - Potential for very large cost savings

### CON

- **Scary Aspect** - Getting comfortable about security
- **Biggest Risk** - Business disruption due to poor planning

Getting help to manage the CONs is cheaper than failure.



### Rowallan Software Services

Rowallan Software Services Ltd was established in 1994 in response to a need for realistic and practicable advice for busy IT departments and, in particular, development teams.

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## Finding the Silver Lining

by David Williams

Outsourcing the operation of key business applications to providers of web-based services has been with us for some time now. In it's latest guise of 'Cloud Computing' it seems to be gaining both market traction and airspace, albeit from a lowly start point. Big players are wading in with cloud offerings, always a good sign that a sea change is about to be with us.

At the most superficial level the business case for cloud computing is overwhelming. Savings on IT spend of anything up to 90% are being talked about. Even when you mix in a dose of realism and account for the specific demands of your business, the case is strong enough that it can still remain compelling for many SMEs. This isn't technology breakthrough, it's simply the economics of scale and market size in operation. IT services are becoming commodities.

I'm not going to expand on the technology of the cloud, nor on the many variants and possibilities for offsite IT deployment. Such information is already readily available. I'd like to focus in on the journey that a company would very likely have to make to embrace cloud computing. There is a gap between expectation and reality - there always seems to be in IT. There are pitfalls and areas of issue. But, properly managed, there are also savings to be made. It is well worth working through the problems to get to the gains.

Let's look at four common questions:

### Will the cloud help my company?

Yes, probably.

Obviously those applications that are already industry standard and have *de facto* commodity status can be deployed through the cloud. Subject to understanding the issues I've noted below, they should normally provide a worthwhile level of cost benefit to your company. Some examples would be E-mail, Office tools, Sales Management and Accounting.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are purpose-written business applications that are highly optimised to your business process. The future deployment of these would need to be planned and written into your overall IT (and business) strategy. You have the options of moving the business towards available cloud software, modifying the business application to be cloud friendly, or of leaving things as they are. These can involve large, board level, decisions that will have far reaching impacts on your business.

Between the two is the raft of today's commonly available business applications, perhaps configured and customised to your needs, that form the backbone of IT in business today. By and large, you will need to consider each of these on merit when considering whether to go the cloud route or not. Some may be already available for cloud operation, some may be cloud-friendly so that you can initiate hosted operation yourself, some may simply be cloud-unfriendly.

### Is the cloud secure?

It would be nice to offer a resounding 'yes'; but the truth is more of a 'yes, but'. Your applications are now going to be online, probably 24x7, and your company's data is very likely at a remote site along with your applications.

You will now acquire an ongoing exposure to the possibilities of denial of service and intrusion attacks. Such attacks are commonplace, sometimes random and sometimes targeted at specific businesses or Governments.

You will also become reliant on the process and capabilities of your provider, and more especially on their staff integrity. Your customer list, for example, is a saleable item.



### Also Think About:

- **Contracts** - Do you have the skills and experience available in-house to manage a range of key contracts and service level agreements?
- **IT Skills** - Does your existing IT skill base need refreshing to supply your needs going forwards?
- **Updates** - Can your business cope with your cloud provider having control of software update timescales?
- **Future** - Will your strategy get you locked in to a specific cloud provider, impeding the evolution of the business?

Getting help to answer the questions is cheaper than guessing the wrong answers.



Companies that conduct their business over the Internet, including many global corporates such as Amazon and Google, have been able to operate successfully in this climate for some considerable time now. The sector is awash with knowledge on attack prevention and mitigation strategies. This knowledge is not always applied, with the expected results, but it certainly can, and should, be by your cloud supplier.

Work with that supplier. Understand thoroughly their capabilities and processes to the point where you are satisfied they can host your applications safely.

I can't promise you will never have problems; this is the Internet, and this is the nature of the beast. However you can reduce potential issues to risk levels that you both understand, and which you believe are survivable.

### What about availability?

Your business is now reliant on a service, paid for by yourself, and delivered by others. Their service record and their quality procedures are now effectively part of your business.

The argument that prevails is much the same as for security. There's plenty of data available. Work with your provider to understand the likely risks of unplanned service breaks. Don't go with them if you are not convinced.

That's fine if all services are delivered into your company office. However one of the key benefits of cloud computing to your business is it's 'use anywhere' nature. You need to be sure that a good user experience can be replicated no matter where your users may have to be. Whereas previously employees travelling could put a few files on their laptop and travel anywhere whilst working, that may no longer be possible.

You need to understand if mobile working is supported with your cloud applications, and also if your employees may find themselves having to work for extended periods where there isn't a reliable, and fast, Internet connection.

### How do I start?

Even in a short piece such as this, it's easy to see that using the cloud is more than just a couple of new lines in the IT budget. Embracing cloud computing as a strategy in anything other than a minor way can re-shape the whole way your company operates.

You may need to re-skill in some areas to be able to liaise and negotiate effectively with your service providers. You may also need to close down some specialties.

Outsourcing application hosting will almost certainly impact your requirements for hardware, all the way from making sure employees have a suitable PC and Internet connection, through to downsizing internal server operation.

So, before deploying anything, get a plan. If you don't have all the skills in-house to do that, then get help. A precipitate and unplanned entry into cloud computing could add to your IT costs, rather than make significant reductions to them in the way it should.

And it's green as well. . . .

<http://www.environmentalleader.com/2010/11/05/cloud-computing-can-cut-carbon-emissions-per-user-by-30/>

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