

Every cloud has a silver lining

The use of a robust technological solution within your SME has the power to supercharge your business growth, simplify day-to-day processes, reduce costs and boost employee performance. One example that has revolutionised the world of business is cloud computing. With its countless benefits and reasonable costs, cloud technology is a requisite for every SME. And – for those of you that aren't quite sure where to start, or are, perhaps, 'lost in the cloud', we offer basic guidelines...

Does your business require the following?

- Minimum hardware components occupying very little of your already small office space
- Automatic upgrades and updates of your important business software
- A low risk option of saving your data
- The flexibility to access not only your data but also all your software anywhere across the world

There's one simple technological solution that can meet all the above business needs and much more – cloud computing. Over the recent years, this topic has received a lot of attention and has become an obvious 'go-to' solution for most businesses. However, for SMEs that are left behind in the technological marathon, or aren't completely convinced of the practicality of cloud computing, we spoke to leading expert Yasser Zeineldin, CEO, eHosting DataFort...

First things first. What is the cloud?

IDC provides a good definition – “Consumer and business products, services and solutions that are delivered and consumed in real time over the Internet”. However, for an SME owner, a more compelling

definition is – a service that enables your business quicker access to applications and services with a flexible pay-as-you-go model with little or no headache of hardware and maintenance issues.

Yasser explains: “In simple terms, cloud computing is a collection of computing resources (Storage, Compute and Network) integrated into a system, managed and delivered through the Internet.”

And – how can it make life easier for an SME owner or director?

Yasser: “With cloud services, SME owners can reduce their overall risks by paying based on a predictable monthly subscription model. In addition, cloud technology enables an SME to deploy services faster and dynamically provision any additional capacity as and when needed. Moreover, cloud based services are simple to adopt and more accessible as they are over the Internet.”

What kind of cloud services are available to SMEs?

Yasser: “There are three types of cloud services which are available to SMEs namely Platform as a Service (PaaS), Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), and Software as a Service (SaaS).




“SaaS and IaaS are gaining a lot of popularity amongst SMEs as they have the flexibility to use software and hardware infrastructure on a pay-as-you-use model and can scale their usage up or down based on their business growth.

“In addition, three types of cloud service models are available for use by SMEs which are: private, public and hybrid cloud services. A private cloud is one in which the services and infrastructure are maintained on a private network; typically at the customer's premises. Managed Service Providers or MSPs are also providing hosted private cloud services within their data centres. A public cloud is one in which the services and infrastructure are provided from a shared infrastructure off-site over the Internet. Customers typically buy services off a store front, which is dynamically (self) provisioned and is further managed by the customer themselves. The combination of cloud systems, with a mix of public or private, is referred to as a hybrid.”

What are some cloud services that eHosting DataFort offers to SMEs?

Yasser: “eHosting DataFort is a leading provider of Managed IT Services. eHDF's





“The absence of a hardware component and the shared nature of numerous other resources mean that the cloud is an economical hosting option.”

Cloud Hosting Services provide an enterprise with the computing power, storage and network capacity, security and flexibility it needs, when it needs it. At the same time, it reduces IT costs significantly and simplifies management and maintenance requirements. Our Cloud Hosting Services include Managed Private Cloud and we will soon be launching Public Cloud Services.”

Do you think there’s a negative mindset towards cloud services within this region?

Yasser: “No, we do not see any negative mindset towards cloud services. In fact, we have seen an increase in demand for cloud services. Both public and private sector entities are increasingly accepting cloud computing as an integral part of their business and are implementing some form of cloud solutions.”

The most important question. What are the benefits of using cloud technology?

Imagine this scenario: You are at a coffee shop sending out some very important emails when you accidentally spill water on your laptop losing all your valuable data. Now, you are in panic mode. When all your data is stored safely on the cloud, simple disasters like this can be completely avoided. Most cloud-based applications have an automatic back-up option so that all your information is always available to you. However, this is just one of its several benefits. Yasser explains further:

1. Reduce Costs

“The absence of a hardware component and the shared nature of numerous other resources mean that the cloud is an economical hosting option. Unlike buying hardware with set specifications, cloud offers flexible capacity based buying options that allow the company to pay only for what they need, making it ideal for small to medium sized businesses.”

2. Streamline work processes

“In comparison to physical servers, which require lead times of four to six weeks for procurement and deployment, cloud services allow the

company to spin new Virtual Machines (VMs) in minutes to address any spikes in business, or perhaps a new campaign. This helps streamline work processes as applications can be rolled out faster.”

3. Enhances portability

“The underlying advantage of cloud is the fact that data is easily accessible from remote locations, over the Internet. Along with the security and scope of utility it offers, cloud computing is simply the best solution to modern business needs that are dynamic and ever-changing.”

4. Boosts speed and efficiency

“Whether for load balancing reasons or in case of physical server (Host Server) failure, cloud enables flexibility to seamlessly move the company’s VMs and maintain availability and access, without barriers.”

What are some top security considerations to keep in mind with cloud computing?

Yasser: “A key concern for every business is the security of its IT infrastructure and its data. It is essential to ensure the highest level of security for your cloud hosted solution through a number of measures including network isolation, state-of-the-art firewall and Network Intrusion Prevention System (NIPS). eHDF offers these services, as well as other enhancements through Anti-malware solutions, Password Auto Repository (PAR) and Host Intrusion Prevention System (HIPS).”

In addition, we might also add here that if security is something that has been keeping you from moving to the cloud, there’s not much to worry about. A majority of the popular cloud-based services are hosted by tech giants like Google, Amazon and so on, who really know what they are doing. Their data centres are equipped with state-of-the-art security tools and cutting-edge encryption. Furthermore, if you are opting for a cloud-based software, security is very often a part of your subscription package and it’s quite natural that the provision they have in place is much better than anything an SME can afford. Ensure to speak to your provider about the security options they can offer.

At what stage should an SME consider implementing a cloud system?

Yasser: “The rate of data creation and



Yasser Zeineldin, CEO, eHosting DataFort

need for structured management typically determines the need for assisted services such as cloud computing, however, our recommendation would be to have a system in place right from inception, which can be adapted and built upon according to growing needs of the organisation.”

Are cloud-based solutions suitable for all types of SMEs?

Yasser: “The cloud system can be customised according to the specific needs of the company, and so is ideal no matter how varied the operations of the SME may be.”

How does an SME decide if a cloud computing solution is right for the business?

Yasser: “Each business has unique data management requirements, which can be determined based on a number of factors such as operational processes, human resources, scale of work, and especially financial capabilities, among others. If an SME wants to save on capital expenditure then cloud is the way to go.”

What is the estimated cost involved in implementing a cloud system within an SME?

Yasser: “The cost involved in implementing a cloud for an SME would vary depending on their specific requirements.”

Are there any legal considerations to keep in mind?

Yasser: “Some of the legal aspects to be aware of would include the service level agreements provided by the service provider. Ensuring proper standards and certification is paramount, alongside definition of contractual terms and conditions.”

Finally, what are some top things to look for when choosing a cloud computing vendor?

Yasser: “Some of the factors to look at are the following:

- Physical location of the Data
- Location of users accessing the service
- Latency /User Experience
- Reputation /Domain expertise of the Service Provider
- Standards and certifications
- SLAs (Service Level Agreements)
- Quality of services (Service availability, Redundancy)
- Customer support services (Setup assistance, Local access, Audit assistance, Administration)
- Pricing and flexibility in plans
- Scalability (Options to upgrade, downgrade)
- Security (Infrastructure, Customer isolation)
- Data privacy (Identity, Access control, Authorisation and Authentication)
- Delivery options available (over VPN, SSH/RDP, MPLS)
- Underlying Virtualization Platform
- Performance driven by infrastructure (Storage IOPS, Virtualization Platform, Network)
- Reporting & Management (Portal, Performance statistics, VM Management)
- No vendor lock in.”

Using this comprehensive guide alongside the expertise of your IT personnel can help you move a step forward in the right direction. And don’t forget what one of the top IT business leaders, Marc Benioff, said: “If someone asks me what cloud computing is, I try not to get bogged down with definitions. I tell them that, simply put, cloud computing is a better way to run your business.”

Happy cloud computing! ■

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