

How to choose a Cloud Computing Provider

What is “The Cloud”?

Cloud computing is best described as storing and accessing data, programs and services over the internet rather than from your computer hard drive or server located on your business premises.

Moving to the cloud?

Have you:

- 1** Prepared a detailed transition and implementation plan including the appointment of someone with the necessary skills to lead the transition project?
- 2** Considered the appropriate management of the cloud service arrangements and agreements after everything is in place?
- 3** Considered a gradual move to cloud services rather than moving everything over at once? This allows an opportunity to align your business processes with the new environment. Email, document sharing and data storage cloud options are popular starting points.

The price/quality trade off

There are many cloud providers available in Australia and internationally and many of these are also Internet Service Providers (ISPs). While the large cloud providers may offer stability

and familiarity, a smaller provider may be able to tailor the service to your business and may have more flexibility with packages and pricing. You need to consider the security and performance levels on offer. It's important to choose the provider that you think best understands your business needs.

Things to consider when choosing a provider

Security

- Are there sufficient security measures to protect information stored within and transferred between the user and the cloud?
- Ask if compliance and security standards are independently audited.
- Can you set up and manage different profiles for staff and other parties accessing your data and control or limit their access?
- Ask if there are back-up arrangements across different physical locations in case of a natural disaster or regional power failure.
- Ask how you will be notified if there has been unauthorised access to your information.
- Ask what the service levels will be, including availability, response times and access speeds.

Privacy

- Cloud providers and businesses must comply with data protection requirements under Australian law. See the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner website for details: www.oaic.gov.au
- Check if your data (including any back-up data) will be stored in Australia or overseas.
- If possible, encrypt data to minimise the risk of exposing private information.

Data ownership

- Remember, data uploaded to cloud services remains the property of your business. So the normal rules around copyright, privacy and any other legal obligations apply.

Easy to use

- Make sure the service is compatible with the operating systems and devices you intend to use, for example PCs, Macs, tablets etc.
- Make sure you can transfer or delete your data on request, including any backed-up or cached data.
- Ensure all aspects of the service are accessible for people with disability.

Contact and support (help desk)

- Is there support for implementation?
- Is there a help desk? How is it accessed, where it is located and what hours is it available?

Legal

- Typically you'll be asked to sign a standard agreement. If this agreement can't be tailored to your needs, find another provider who can.
- Is the provider subject to Australian laws including laws relating to data protection, consumer protection, contracts, copyright, privacy and law enforcement?
- If you decide to move to another provider in the future, make sure that your data will be preserved and easily transferred.

Legal continued

- Sometimes services fail, so ask about appropriate compensation when data is lost or privacy is breached.
- Ask if your provider has supplier provisions to protect your data if the provider goes out of business or into liquidation.

Resolving a dispute

In the case of a dispute with your provider, you may have restrictions placed on your account. This may occur from an unpaid bill through to a breach (perceived or otherwise) of the terms of use. It is essential to understand the implications of such an event and to ask the cloud service provider about the processes they have in place. If you are unable to resolve a dispute with your cloud provider in a timely manner, you may be able to lodge a complaint with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO). Visit www.tio.com.au

Other operational issues to consider:

Your internet connection and monthly data allowance

You will need a fast, reliable internet connection.

You should revisit your internet package inclusions – your data usage may increase when you move to a cloud provider due to increased downloads and uploads. Your current monthly data allowance may be insufficient and consequently incur additional charges.

IT skills to manage the transition and beyond

You will need access to someone with sufficient IT skills to select, plan, and implement cloud computing services within your small business. These skills can be contracted, however you will still require people within your organisation who know what the cloud arrangements are and can monitor and control the relationship with the provider.

Change in business needs

Can your provider scale the services up or down should your business needs change?



SMALL BUSINESS TIPSHEET

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Consumer Action Network

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