How Does Cloud Computing Benefit Small Businesses?

The “cloud” is all around us—it connects us to our electronic lives as we access our email, search our contacts lists, log onto social media profiles, upload photos, or perform everyday tasks such as banking, shopping, or reading the day’s headlines. And as smart-device and PC manufacturers create more powerful computing devices geared toward increased mobility, the cloud will soon be following us everywhere, if it isn’t already.

These days, while many people have heard of cloud computing and have experienced its benefits firsthand in their personal lives, few understand how the cloud can help their business. The truth is, cloud computing has the potential to revolutionize small- and medium-sized business; the cost savings, increased productivity, and enhanced efficiency that can be realized through switching to cloud services can help any business succeed in tough marketplaces and even tougher economies.

WHAT IS THE CLOUD?

Cloud computing, simply, allows businesses to “rent” IT and hosting services instead of investing in new infrastructure, training new personnel, or licensing new software. It differs from traditional hosting in three key areas: cloud service is sold on demand; it is flexible, allowing a user to employ as much or as little of a service as they want at any given time; and the service is fully managed by the provider. Cloud computing offers a simple operational expense that is easier to budget for month-by-month, so there’s no longer a need to spend capital on assets that will depreciate by the month. Additionally, customers do not need to pay for excess resource capacity in-house to meet fluctuating demands.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CLOUD SERVICES

Three categories of cloud services have evolved in the past several years, and each offers its own unique set of benefits for business customers.

Software as a Service (SaaS), perhaps the most familiar of categories, offers software for common work functions such as e-mail (using POP mail or Microsoft Exchange mail); desktop applications (such as Microsoft Word and Excel); and for specialized functions such as accounting, payroll, or customer relationship management (CRM).

Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) offers businesses remote access to IT resources such as servers, CPUs, storage devices, and other hardware and networking equipment. The business owner and in-house IT team are freed...
from managing this hardware and maintaining proper environmental conditions.

*Platform as a Service (PaaS)*, is a cloud service providing shared resources—including hardware and software—that are available on demand. Businesses leverage PaaS to develop and host their customized web-based applications for internal use or as part of their strategy for enabling e-commerce and web-based marketing. When combined with the benefits of IaaS, this category of services lets subscribers download and manage the software of their choice for application design, development, testing, and deployment.

**TANGIBLE BENEFITS OF CLOUD COMPUTING**

*Reduced Costs*: Capital can be redirected from infrastructure and licensing costs and put toward other business-enhancing areas.

*Scalability*: Cloud services can be adjusted to meet the needs of any business, at any point in time.

*Automatic Updates*: Through cloud hosting, refreshing of software and related products is routine and regular.

*Remote Access*: Hosted software, storage, and services in the cloud allowing for a more nimble workforce.

*Disaster Relief*: If your business were to suffer a weather- or power-related shutdown, your data would not only be preserved but could be accessed from other locations than your physical place of business.

*Ease of Implementation*: Executing different IT set-ups are simple and streamlined.

*Skilled Support*: Hosted services are supported by cloud experts, eliminating the need for in-house specialists or individualized training.

**SOLUTIONS**

CornerStone’s Companies like SkySphere only from CornerStone have created cloud infrastructure and make it available on a rental basis to small and medium sized business to host and deliver their mission-critical data and applications all with a service-level agreement. Through its agreements with Microsoft, SkySphere only from CornerStone can also provide legal copies of enterprise software and operating systems such as SQL server, BizTalk server, Windows Server 2008, Exchange 2010 and most other software titles on a subscription basis.

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