

# What is Cloud computing?

Cloud computing is a generic, catch-all term that many people use to explain many different IT concepts, solutions and services that might or might not be actually be cloud computing. Because cloud computing is constantly evolving, the IT industry has had a difficult time creating a concrete definition for the concept. This article will focus on defining the basic nature of cloud computing, which won't change, regardless of how cloud computing evolves.

## What it is

Cloud Computing is an IT service intended for business use that vendors such as Salesforce.com, Rack-space and WebSense offer "on-demand". Vendors provide "on-demand" services such as CRM, off-site storage, hosted email solutions, secure web portals, etc. Instead of spending money on applications and hardware, businesses have access to the same resources without the commitment of ownership.

## Where it's located

Because services are provided over the internet, the vendor can be located anywhere in the world and it won't impact quality of service. Businesses can access most purchased solutions through a secure device such as a workstation, laptop or smartphone and a web browser such as Internet Explorer or Firefox.

## Key characteristics

While each cloud computing vendor will operate with a slightly different business plan, all vendors do share similarities.

- **Affordable-** As an "on-demand" service, vendors will only charge businesses for the resources used. Typically, you will sign a contract of some sort, but the terms are flexible and should meet your business needs.
- **Scalable-** Most vendors provide cloud computing services to organisations of any size. Your business will not be restricted by its number of users or amount of data.
- **Self-service-** While vendors will maintain the hardware and the solution, your business will be responsible for maintaining all data.
- **Multi-tenancy-** Vendors store data from multiple companies on the same hardware. Don't worry; your business' data will be kept separate and secure through application architecture, while sharing resources such as storage, memory and processing power.
- **Redundant data storage-** Most solutions provide multiple physical sites where they will store multiple copies of data, making cloud computing suitable for businesses that need high-availability.

## Key Benefits

Every business that uses cloud computing solutions will realise many benefits. While some benefits will be particular to your individual business, two key benefits that all businesses realise are as follows:

- **No out-of-pocket infrastructure costs-** With cloud computing, your business won't need to buy additional servers, hardware or networking equipment to take advantage of a solution.
- **Simple to support-** Vendors will service and support their solution, upgrading and patching your solution so you don't have to.

### Types of solutions

- Managed email- Many vendors offer solutions that will work well at your physical business site and on you mobile devices such as iPhones, Blackberries and other smartphones.
- Email Archiving- With cloud computing, your business can store an unlimited amount of email, providing your business with a clear audit trail.
- Secure Web Gateway- This cloud computing solution will babysit your network by limiting access to specific web pages and blocking access to others. This enhanced security will help protect your entire IT network from malware.
- CRM- Vendors such as Salesforce.com and Dynamics provide customisable customer management, sales, and marketing campaign tools for your business.
- Finance/Accounting- The vendor will host the software application, process the data, integrate it with taxes and also take care of payroll, expenses and other business needs.

### To learn more

To learn more about cloud computing and how your business will benefit from one or more of the available solutions, please contact the outsource IT consulting experts at AlphaScan at (023) 8025 3008.