

Booking space on the cloud

The impact of cloud computing is as big as the industrial revolution, said Gary Turner, Managing Director of Xero. Well, he would say that, wouldn't he? Xero is a cloud-based accounting system and its success depends on businesses becoming comfortable moving their bookkeeping online.

That Turner, speaking last year, was widely quoted in the media implies that his words resonated with others. 2014 was, in the opinion of many, the year that cloud computing grew up. Its image as just a massive online storage system began to fade and a growing number of firms realised that the cloud could entirely transform the way they do business.

It's not fanciful to assume that in just a few years cloud computing will become the norm, particularly for smaller businesses. Running your own servers and having dedicated in-house IT staff could quickly look very old fashioned, not to mention inefficient.

The benefits of cloud computing

For the moment, one of the main reasons that firms are moving to cloud computing is to cut costs. But there are other genuine advantages, including:

- **Improved cash flow.** It only takes one major customer to pay late to create a cash flow problem. Cloud computing can help protect your bank balance by removing the need for significant capital expenditure on hardware.
- **Faster access to new technology.** The cloud lowers the barriers to better technology, allowing firms to adopt earlier and reap the benefits sooner. A good example is Office 365, which means organisations are always using the latest Microsoft Office apps.
- **Cuts pressure on IT support staff.** Hardware issues become someone else's problem. In addition, cloud computing can cut the number of in-house specialists required to keep day-to-day operations running smoothly.
- **Reduces the risk of data loss.** Poor data management is often a hidden cost for organisations. Despite years of telling people to backup their important files, many employees still don't bother and firms pay the price when laptops are stolen or hard drives fail. Automated cloud backup to systems such as Dropbox helps solve this problem.
- **More competitive.** Over half of the businesses using cloud computing believe that they're more competitive, as a result of the factors listed above. The cloud lets them do more for less and as they move further and further into cloud systems, their competitive advantage may keep growing.

The barriers to cloud computing

So if cloud computing is so attractive, why isn't everyone doing it? Here are some of the reasons why businesses are holding back from using more web-based apps:

- **Worries about security.** This is the top concern, with a recent survey showing that three out of four organisations won't put all their eggs in the cloud basket for this reason. Interestingly, other research shows that data is as safe in the cloud as it is when stored locally.
- **Privacy concerns.** This is issue number two for those nervous about the cloud, and is often tied in with regulatory issues around storage of certain types of data.
- **Investment already made on premises.** Understandably, firms that have recently spent a lot on a new system that's not cloud-based won't be rushing to switch to an online alternative.

- **Fear of losing control.** There's a certain comfort to be had in having all your business hardware and software running where you can see it. Using online apps for peripheral functions, such as for alternative storage, is one thing, but it requires a change in thinking to trust your business critical systems to a third party provider.

Whatever is holding firms back today, there's no doubt that cloud computing will increasingly become the norm. In 2010, less than half of the UK's organisations were using cloud apps, while in 2014 over three quarters had moved that way. It's predicted that adoption rates will increase in 2015

Find out more about cloud computing

We're helping our clients explore the potential of the cloud, whether through switching to Office 365 or allowing their day-to-day IT support to be handled remotely. Other areas where we can assist are:

- **A system health check and strategic review.** This includes identifying the potential opportunities for using cloud apps in your organisation. Our health check identifies strengths and weaknesses, and our strategic review considers the improvements that would benefit the overall business.
- **Remote monitoring and control of mobile devices.** A growing number of phones and tablets tap into your firm's computer networks, presenting both a benefit and a potential security risk. Our mobile device management service puts you back in control, allowing tracking, blocking and management of these devices, wherever they are.
- **Using the cloud to make IT support invisible.** Our service monitors activity on all your firm's computers, spotting potential problems before they occur and applying fixes without any disruption to your day-to-day operations. Our service is 24/7.
- **Helping you migrate to the cloud.** In a few years, it's likely that most organisations will run almost all their apps through the cloud, which means that at some time, your firm will be making that move. We help clients understand their options, then plan and execute the process.

If you want to know more about how we can help your firm understand cloud systems, give us a call on 0808 168 9135 or email enquiries@itsupport365.co.uk. We'd be pleased to have a no-obligation conversation with you.

Your business will be using the cloud more extensively in the future, because that's the way IT is heading. We can help you take advantage of the potential sooner and be one of those firms seeing real competitive advantage.