



CLOUD TECHNOLOGY

Claiming your spot in the fast lane

Embrace change

Change is undoubtedly a double-edged sword for businesses—while it can offer unprecedented opportunity to drive topline revenue and improve efficiency, it can also pose big challenges for your core operations and infrastructure. Change comes in many forms—it can be new products, customer segments, and suppliers; mergers and acquisitions; or expanding geographies. All provide opportunities for growth, but only if you're in a position to capitalize on them.

The key to achieving the next level of success is to make change your friend, using it as an opportunity to improve processes rather than being imprisoned by your current infrastructure. There's nothing more frustrating than seeing a market opportunity and not being able to seize it. Or seizing the opportunity, then being unable to execute well enough to realize its full potential. Increasingly, cloud technology is being seen as an essential tool for turning change from a threat into an opportunity.

Understanding of cloud computing within the general business community has been an evolutionary process; however, the picture of what it is, how it works, and what it means has become crystal clear. Imagine being able to:

- Open new offices and acquire new companies without having to worry about buying servers or managing a myriad of technology platforms.
- Expand and contract system capacity seamlessly to accommodate seasonal or cyclical variations.
- Reduce the burden on IT and allow those valuable resources to focus on more strategic activities.
- Enable employees to work the way they live—on their mobile devices and on-the-go.

Let's explore five key ways cloud computing can make these "what-if" scenarios possible.

5 ways that cloud solutions power business agility

1. Drive change and innovation

When IT resources are focused on maintaining existing infrastructure and on-premises solutions, they are unavoidably stuck in a defensive operational mode—just keeping things up and running is an overwhelming effort. As a result, they struggle to get ahead of the basics to support more strategic initiatives that can facilitate change in the organization. Cloud-based business solutions help drive a fundamental shift in IT, from system deployment and operations to technology business partner.

Meanwhile, cloud-based solutions let organizations take risks—allowing companies to pursue new business opportunities without adding expensive infrastructure. It's also possible to take advantage of new, innovative functionality more quickly and cost-effectively than was historically possible. If an initiative succeeds, it can be scaled seamlessly to a wider audience. If it fails, the project can be shut down quickly.

Companies are definitely starting to take notice of cloud's potential. IDC forecasts that by 2021, public cloud spending will exceed \$277 billion.¹

This unprecedented level of flexibility enables companies to foster an environment that's fundamentally more conducive to implementing new, innovative ideas—not just within IT, but throughout the entire organization. Companies are clearly starting to take notice of cloud's potential.

2. Empower workers

To do their jobs better, faster, and more flexibly, workers have turned increasingly to "shadow systems" outside of officially sanctioned core IT applications. Personal mobile devices are used to tap into the company network. Teams use personal file-sharing accounts and project management tools to work on projects together. In short, workers are implementing their own cloud-based solutions to achieve the ease of use and functionality they need but aren't getting from their own IT departments. A recent Frost & Sullivan study shows that more than 80% of respondents (a mix of IT and business employees from large-size companies) are using non-approved cloud computing applications to do their work.²

These applications aren't necessarily "bad," but if used in the wrong way or not surrounded by the right security infrastructure and protocols, they can expose businesses to unnecessary risk—theft of intellectual property, lost data, even damage to a company's reputation.

How can cloud help? With the right cloud-based applications, organizations can help employees to do their jobs better, faster, smarter, and more collaboratively. The result: decreased company risk, as employees no longer have to enlist outside sources to optimize job performance.

3. Fuel global growth

For many organizations, emerging markets and remote locations comprise the next great business frontier. However, capitalizing on those opportunities can be complex and expensive—getting the technical skills and equipment in place to establish operations is not a trivial undertaking. Combine that with the fact that there are so many variables: What skills will be available to support enterprise systems? What types of new regulations and reporting requirements will have to be met?

Cloud-based solutions allow businesses to rapidly establish a new presence or expand existing operations in virtually any region without having to physically be there, which substantially minimizes both capital investments and risk. They also offer better business outcomes by allowing remote offices to operate seamlessly alongside other business units and headquarters, and make it easier to share information regardless of partner or supplier location. And assuming that an organization is working with a robust cloud solution, it will likely have support for multiple languages and currencies, which makes localization much easier to achieve.

4. Simplify compliance

Keeping aligned with continuous changes in software, security, and regulations is typically complex, manual, and expensive. It's a daunting effort, and yet, businesses have no option but to do their best to comply.

This is an area where cloud-based solutions offer extraordinary benefits to businesses eager to increase productivity and reduce risk. In a cloud-based SaaS world, security and compliance updates can be pushed out automatically to the entire organization as soon as they're available. Not only does this simplify the process of keeping systems up-to-date, it also ensures that everyone in the company has access to the most current information and tools to do their jobs effectively.

Capitalizing on this opportunity to rein in the complexity, cost, and risk of compliance is relevant to nearly every business, but it's particularly compelling to highly regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals and healthcare. The approach also offers huge value for firms operating in multiple countries, which can make regulatory and compliance challenges even more complex and costly.

5. Achieve 24x7x365 service

In today's economy, downtime means lost revenue. Companies can't afford to have their critical applications offline. If a customer can't do business with a company, the competition will be more than happy to take over. And in a world that's always "switched on," keeping the proverbial lights burning around the clock is fast becoming a business imperative.

The right cloud computing solution is available 24x7x365, no matter where employees are located or what devices they're using. Because cloud computing providers deploy equipment that is typically far more reliable than anything most companies would use for their own on-premise solutions, they can achieve system up-time levels that are difficult to match. Meanwhile, according to Dun & Bradstreet, 59% of Fortune 500 companies experience a minimum of 1.6 hours of downtime per week.³ That translates to more than 70 hours a year, at a cost of more than \$46 million per year in lost labor alone. If a disruption does occur, redundancy in the form of failover solutions and secure backups, along with highly trained staff, allows cloud providers to get service back up and running quickly—and ensure that data is restored.

The new IT reality has arrived and brought with it unprecedented agility for users, businesses, and the marketplace. With cloud solutions, companies have an opportunity to fundamentally transform the way they operate—not just at a technical level and with their IT back room, but in every part of the business internally as well as with suppliers and customers. The race is on, and companies that figure out how to take the wheel have the opportunity to win big.

1. IDC Worldwide Public Cloud Services Spending Forecast January 2018

2. Frost & Sullivan Stratecast, "The Hidden Truth Behind Shadow IT," p. 4.

3. IT-Director.com, "Assessing the Financial impact of Downtime,"

<http://www.it-director.com/business/costs/content.php?cid=12043>

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