Move your business to the cloud

You probably hear a lot these days about small and medium-sized businesses moving their operations to the cloud. Even so, just why you should take the leap to the cloud still may be unclear. After all, it wasn't too long ago that the term cloud computing burst onto the IT scene.

Now with cloud computing firmly established as mainstream technology, you may want to take a closer look.

With cloud computing, your company's software no longer sits on each desktop or somewhere on your network. Instead, service providers host your applications on remote servers, which you access over the Internet now redefined as "the cloud."

These remote servers can run anything from your email to customer relationship management software (CRM) and store all of your documents. You simply log into a web-based service to access all the applications you need.

34%

SMBs will use the cloud to some degree for voice communications by the end of 2014[1].

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5 Big Benefits of the Cloud

1 Flexibility

Everyone in your business can access company information from anywhere at any time. That's a great boost to productivity, collaboration and customer service, not to mention efficiency.

CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT FLEXIBLE WORKING

2 Cost Savings

You can cost-effectively take advantage of cloud applications and services since you only pay for usage.

There are no additional costs for infrastructure, operation and management. You don't need to worry about or spend money on upgrades and maintenance, which means your IT staff can focus on the mission-critical aspects of your business that involve your products and service offerings.

3 Platform Independence

It doesn't matter what device you are using to work - smartphone, tablet, laptop or PC. Cloud services are available and run on all of them. You won't need multiple versions of the same software for different platforms.

4 Scalability

Most cloud service providers enable you to scale IT resources to accommodate your changing business needs.

This will allow you to support your business growth without expensive changes to your existing IT systems.

5 Enhanced competitiveness

Cloud computing can level the competitive playing field. You have access to the same applications and services larger enterprises employ to support infrastructure needs, expand online marketing and customer engagement, and boost communication and collaboration.
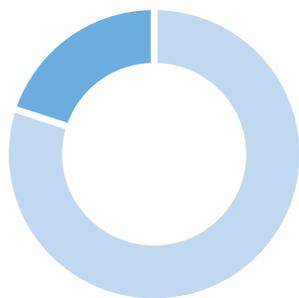
SMB cloud spending will grow over the next five years by nearly

20%[2]

Top Cloud Applications and Services

Storage and sharing

Use the cloud to access documents from anywhere that has Internet access and from any of your devices. Share documents with any member of your team or with customers. Popular free tools include **DropBox**, **SugarSync** and **Microsoft SkyDrive**. They also offer paid business plans with enhanced features for low monthly fees.

Online meeting and conferencing

Cloud-based services make it easy to video conference or share screens from a desktop, laptop or even on a mobile device A popular solution is **Skype**, now owned by Microsoft, which includes video conferencing and group calls for free or inexpensive rates. If you need more features such as toll-free call-in numbers, smartphone and tablet functionality, and recordable meetings, check out the low cost of **Cisco WebEx** or **Avaya Scopia video conferencing**.

Document collaboration

Collaborate on the development of a document or presentation using any device. Create a project folder and drag and drop in files. Send a URL or invite a team member or customers to view or edit documents adding comments. With cloud collaboration, you'll never have to look for the latest document version and can make changes in real-time. Popular services include **Google's Drive** and **Microsoft Office 365**, the cloud-based version of Microsoft Office, which also works with Skype.

Email

Cloud-based email is accessible anytime from any device. You also get built in backup and archival services and eliminate the need to buy server-based anti-virus, anti-spam and email filtering products. Popular cloud email services for small and medium-sized businesses are available with **Office 365** and **Google Apps**.

Other popular services

- The cloud can put email and social media marketing well within reach of small and medium-sized businesses, with marketing automation services such as **Spark** by Marketo
- Accounting tools, such as the cloud-based version of **Quickbooks** and **Paychex** help small and medium-sized businesses keep track of their finances and payroll.
- A dynamic presentation can set you apart from the competition during a sales pitch. **Prezi** is cloud-based presentation tools that can help your presentations stand out.
- Note-taking becomes effortless with cloud applications like **Evernote** which allow you to take notes on the fly from any device. The app automatically syncs your latest version to all of your devices so you never forget anything.
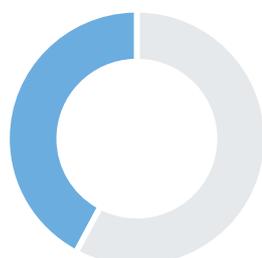
42% of SMBs are already using Web conferencing tools (like WebEx), and **another 9%** plan to implement one in the next six months[3].

Cloud Computing Options

Public Cloud

With a public cloud option, services are provided remotely in a multi-tenant environment. You share hardware, storage and network resources with other companies.

They reduce complexity and lead time to deploy.

Private Cloud

Private Cloud is also remotely located but you use services and network resources entirely devoted to your business.

You have more options for customization.

Hybrid Cloud

The hybrid cloud, as the name implies, a combination of both public and private solution.

Your business may use the public cloud for email management, and the private Cloud to store your data.

Top 5 fastest growing applications through 2016[4]:

1. **Online backup and storage**
2. **Instant collaboration**
3. **Online Accounting**
4. **File Sharing**
5. **Web Conferencing**

30%

of SMB's are already using team collaboration tools (like Evernote) or plan to implement one in the next 6 months[3].

3 Steps to Getting Started

1. Identify your needs

Determine which cloud option is right for you (public, private or hybrid) and then review your current IT tasks and consider what your requirements will be in the future as your business grows. This will help you decide what cloud-based applications you need.

2. Ask questions

When you are evaluating cloud service providers, compare the features of their various offerings, including scalability and ease of use. Ask about security measures to protect against data breaches and uptime guarantees, since downtime is something you can't afford.

3. Try before you buy

Test out various solutions. Evaluate if the performance is at least equal or better than managing the application on premise.

[1] The Benefits of Unified Communications - How Businesses plan to communicate in 2014 - SpiceWorks study commissioned by Plantronics
[2] Cloud Computing in the Midmarket: Assessing the Options in 2013. IDC Report. January 2013. http://idcdocserv.com/995
[3] Catching Up to the Cloud: Steady migration into cloud-based file sharing, email, and productivity services. SpiceWorks study commissioned by LogMeIn. June 2013. http://itreports.spiceworks.com/reports/spiceworks_voice_of_it_cloud_report_061813.pdf
[4] Profit from the cloud - Parallels SMB Cloud Insights. Parrallels Report. January 2013. http://www.parallels.com/fileadmin/parallels/documents/smb-reports/2013/2013_SMB_Brochure_US_web.pdf

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