



KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUD

DEMYSTIFYING DISASTER RECOVERY

By Robin Howard

IF YOU'VE BEEN INTIMIDATED BY ALL THE HYPE SURROUNDING CLOUD COMPUTING, YOU'LL BE GLAD TO KNOW THAT FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE, THIS TECHNOLOGY IS PRETTY SIMPLE – AT LEAST IN HOW YOU AND YOUR COMPANY CAN USE IT.

“The cloud” is just a metaphor for “the Internet” and it works just like an electricity grid – resources, software, and information are provided to users on demand and in the quantity demanded. Until about 10 years ago, almost all of those resources were provided by geographically-restricted client-server systems – which also required a significant capital investment in hardware, software, space and skilled staff to maintain them. Now, any business of any size, and even individuals, can consume storage space, software and other resources “in the cloud” without having to own or manage a datacenter. In fact, an individual can usually store information – a 1 GB photo library for instance, in the cloud (on the Internet) for free and can rent additional space for about \$0.25 per GB per year if needed.



For more information on backup and recovery in the cloud.

Right now, the real impact of the cloud is realized in small- to mid-sized business. For the near future, it may not be practical for large-scale enterprises to scrap their datacenters and staff and move to the cloud, so many will likely continue to rely on mainframes and client-server architecture until it's no longer possible or cost-effective to maintain it. However, for small- and mid-sized businesses (SMBs), the disaster recovery possibilities of the cloud are like pennies (dollars, pounds, Euros, yens, rupees, shillings, etc.) from heaven. Here's why:

Imagine one of your local businesses – the local bicycle shop, veterinarian, mechanic, law office or medical practice. Each of these organizations relies on technology such as Web sites, inventory, point-of-sale software, staff scheduling programs, e-mail, and record keeping. In the case of legal and medical (also, financial and some manufacturing) businesses, they must adhere to strict compliance regulations about such things as how long records must be kept and how long they must be able to produce a record on demand. If one of these businesses loses access to its technology for a day – or even an hour – there could be serious consequences (fines, lost revenue, lost customer data and confidence) that are difficult to recover from. It's critical, therefore, that SMBs store a current copy of their data somewhere safe and accessible. In the past decade, this process was so expensive that many SMBs resorted to dodgy tape-based backup systems, or worse, used no backup at all and hoped for the best.

Today, instead of just crossing fingers or paying for the hardware, software, space and staff required for storage, an entire mid-sized corporation can rent enough cloud space (about 400 GB) to keep a *real-time, full-server* backup copy of all its data, applications and operating systems for about \$300 per month. Real time means every keystroke, every e-mail, every bit and byte is safe, and full-server means every application (and even the whole operating system) is safe and available. But wait – it gets even better: It's also now possible to back up data into the cloud in real time, and it's possible to retrieve it from the cloud...nearly as fast.

What this means for SMBs is that if the store burns down, is flooded or someone spills a latte on the server, daily operations can resume in minutes instead of days (or never, as is the case 40 percent of the time when an SMB suffers a disaster). Though it may take a couple of years for it to become standard, the cloud is fully scalable to even the largest organizations, and some are beginning to realize the cost and time savings of chucking their datacenters and letting someone else deal with it.

Quite simply, cloud computing is a giant leap forward in technology; it's what the cell phone is to the rotary phone. It's simple, cheap, eco-friendly, a great option for disaster recovery – and it's only going to get better.

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