

Before you move your business to the cloud

 By [Elaine Wang](#)

26 Nov 2014

The South African digital economy is booming - with rapidly decreasing prices of connectivity, coupled with more and more cheap and cheerful entrants into the smartphone game, the average South African is now more exposed to cloud computing than ever before.

We are using cloud services, such as Facebook, iCloud and Gmail, often without realising that these are cloud services. Yet, while the average consumer has fast adopted cloud technologies, business adoption is a little slower.

According to the World Wide Worx SME Survey for 2014, cloud uptake among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) increased from 9% in 2012 to 27% today. And this figure could double in the next 12 to 24 months as 30% of surveyed SMEs are unsure of their cloud plans. Why the uncertainty? Cloud computing has received a lot of press in recent years, but, in spite of this, businesses often don't fully understand the benefits and get caught up in some of the misconceptions, such as it being expensive and bandwidth intensive.

The reality is that a well-constructed cloud computing solution can go a long way in reducing IT costs, while increasing operational efficiency and reducing business risk. Cloud offerings provide a good back-up and disaster-recovery solution to ensure 24x7, always-on productivity. The flexibility inherent in any cloud subscription means that the solutions are extremely scalable and are able to provide small business with enterprise-grade solutions at an affordable price point. These enterprise-grade solutions can contribute to levelling out the playing field for SMEs against the heavyweights in their respective industries.

When's a good time?

So when is a good time for businesses to have the cloud conversation? The short answer is: when there's a business need for it.

Moving to the cloud for the sake of moving, or because everyone is doing it, is likely to result in wasted time and money - and not all business models are suited to the cloud.

Cloud solutions are ideal for a new business that does not have any existing infrastructure, as there is little requirement for upfront capital outlay. It allows users to get started quickly and easily, while giving them the ability to scale as their business starts to grow. For a business that has existing on-premises infrastructure, it is worthwhile to assess whether or not the existing technology investment is still performing at required standards (hardware might have become extremely sluggish), or if there are any changes to the business landscape and new business challenges that call for a re-look at how things are

done. As an example, consider the average worker nowadays - we often have multiple devices, ranging from smartphones, to tablets, laptops and PCs. The benefit that cloud brings is that users are able to access all of their important documents, regardless of which device they are using. With changes in how we do business, due to advancements in technology, businesses really need to evaluate whether or not there are more effective and cost-effective ways to get the job done, and done better.

As an example...

Take the Microsoft cloud products as an example. Through an Office 365 subscription, users are able to access and work seamlessly across all their important documents and emails on desktops, tablets, laptops and smartphones. It also gives each user five installs of Office, allowing them to work from anywhere. For the individual users, it encourages a greater level of collaboration, while increasing data security. For the business, it offers a secure and easy-to-use back-up solution for precious data, while giving people the ability to share documents and collaborate on important projects effectively. Businesses can also use Azure as a back-up tool, ensuring that they comply with business legislation, or to host business-critical applications. One of the biggest benefits of cloud offerings lies in how they are licensed. Office 365 is licensed per user, while Azure is licensed on a consumption-based model, where you only pay for what you use.

Navigating the cloud and choosing the best solutions can be tricky, which is why businesses should enlist the help of an experienced service provider that can offer advice and a well-defined, structured implementation plan. The service provider should work closely with the business to understand its challenges across various levels in order to aid in finding the best technology solutions to meet the business need. In choosing a service provider, also remember to ask them if they are able to provide a training programme to educate staff on how to use the technology. At the same time, the business needs to think about an adoption strategy, and implement a plan to encourage the use of new technology.

Traditionally, businesses sink precious capital into hardware and software that often depreciate at a rapid pace. Cloud solutions tip this model upside down, so businesses don't necessarily need to tie up capital and are able to subscribe to a service that gives them the ability to do the same, if not more, than the traditional model. The new model helps the business to build a predictable, stable budget for its IT so that there are no nasty surprises later on. In addition, cloud solutions offer businesses near 100% uptime, ensuring they can focus on what they do best.

Gen Y, our up-and-coming decision makers, are an extremely tech-savvy generation, that has become accustomed to 'new-age services'. Take websites like Kickstarter as an example, which allow you to access funds to start up a new business idea through crowd funding, or even Airbnb, which allows you to rent out an extra room in your house for travellers - it's clear that this is a generation that is not afraid to push the limits of what's been done before them. They have already started entering the workforce, demanding more flexible working styles that provide them with everything from anywhere. Businesses need to start evolving and re-looking how they do IT to meet these expectations. Not only will businesses be able to get more done more efficiently, but according to global surveys, tech-savvy businesses tend to grow faster than their non-tech-savvy counterparts - now, that's a strong deciding factor.

ABOUT ELAINE WANG

I am a driven and extremely hard working individual, with a keen eye for business ideas and opportunities.

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