

Moving Your Business to the Cloud:

Three Top Reasons Why the Time Is Now

Since the world's transition from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, a paradigm shift has occurred that should change the way business leaders think about their operations. For most of the last century, businesses were built on people (labor, knowledge and innovation) and mechanized equipment. In this century, the most successful, agile businesses are still built on people, but business processes and technology have supplanted mechanized equipment in the hierarchy of importance.

This isn't to say that mechanical processes are going away—for many companies they remain a part of their business operations. Yet, all businesses—even those that rely on industrial machines—must be able to harness technology, gain more visibility into their performance and implement more efficient processes to achieve and maintain a competitive edge.

The question then becomes, "How can an organization most effectively develop and deploy people, technology and business processes?" I submit that there currently is no better way for most businesses to achieve this goal than by moving to the Cloud. In this article, I'll share my reasoning for this recommendation.

Architecting a Better Foundation

The structure of people, processes and technology is tiered, with each component occupying a specific, immutable level. Technology is always the foundation, with infrastructure positioned at the base, followed by applications and data (level two). Upon that platform resides level three—the business processes that drive better outcomes, from more efficient inventory control to better customer relations management. At the top of the hierarchy reside the people who put all of these tools and techniques to work for the benefit of the firm.

If the lowest level—the infrastructure—isn't designed and constructed properly, it impacts the stability of the entire technology stack. Inadequate or improperly designed and deployed infrastructure will limit accessibility to data and applications. It will reduce the functionality and flow of business processes and negatively impact the productivity of the people. Compounding the danger, recent studies suggest that technology deficiencies and the business impediments that result can even squelch business innovation, as well.

Before infrastructure can offer the most stable platform possible, it must offer three things: **Availability, Security and Mobility**. Furthermore, evidence is becoming overwhelming that for businesses of all sizes, these benefits are most readily achieved via the Cloud.

Criteria #1: Availability

Availability is a business's capacity to have designated operations running continuously, and for its workers to never be deprived access to key corporate resources, whenever and wherever they need them. It also means organizational reassurance that IT system outages will never shut down operations unexpectedly.

For modern businesses, 99.99% uptime is the metric that defines best practices availability. Below that, a firm will not

achieve maximum productivity, and it cannot reasonably offer its customers 24/7 web-based access to services, from checking the status of orders to placing a new request.

It's inevitable that leadership in some organizations dismisses the importance of such robust availability, believing that a minor downtime event won't impact them. Compounding the problem, research firms often cite "cost of downtime" metrics that seem outlandish to SMB owners.

We do not have room here to offer an in-depth discussion on the cost of downtime, so we will save that for a later article. The key takeaway is that downtime is destructive to any firm. When the cost of lost revenue and opportunity, disrupted productivity and operations flow, IT recovery costs, and damage to the corporate reputation are all part of the equation, the price tag of downtime for even small firms can run thousands of dollars per minute.

Furthermore, the increasing complexity and dispersal of IT systems are increasing the odds of downtime for all organizations. A recent study found that the growth of business apps, expansion of data and development of mobile computing are three top culprits in downtime (65, 51 and 44 percent, respectively).

When businesses run their mission critical operations in the Cloud, achieving 99.99% uptime becomes an attainable goal. Resources are available in the office and out of it, eliminating reliance on (and management hassles for) local, physical servers. Cloud-based storage for business apps and data is more accessible, and assets enjoy geographic protection from disasters. Some cloud solutions even enable data stores to be "spun up" as virtual servers quickly in the event an office location is destroyed.

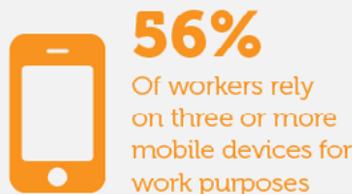
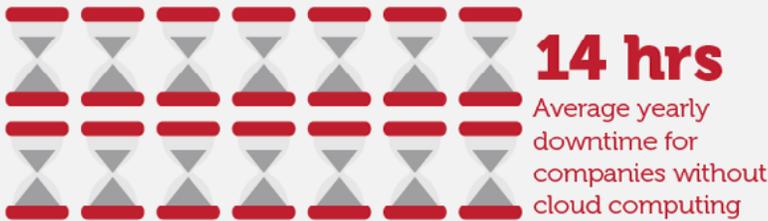
Criteria #2: Security

Being able to protect the company's assets, data and reliability 24/7 has become crucial, not only to the modern business, but for any business operation. Cybercriminals are targeting businesses in all segments and size categories nearly equally, and in a world of increasingly interconnected technology, having physical control over infrastructure is no assurance of safety.

The only rational, affordable solution is to protect the company from inside and out—securing IT resources from inside the systems themselves, creating a stalwart external defense and securing the conduits by which information travels.

For most firms to accomplish these goals on-premise, the cost and complexity would be overwhelming. That's why so many business owners either ignore or minimize the need for **security**

Success for the Modern Business: Availability, Security, & Mobility in the Cloud



Top Sources of IT-Related Downtime



or outsource it to third-party service providers. (In case you are curious, most of those services are cloud-based. More than 50% of all corporate IT security is now hosted in the Cloud.)

Admittedly, security is still the number one reason for “cloud rejection,” but concern does not equate to danger. Objection is diminishing noticeably, and most IT professionals recognize that properly secured cloud environments are safer than, on-premise environments. For small to mid-sized businesses without the know-how to manage security, there is no doubt that a well-managed cloud environment is more secure than an in-house system.

As Neil MacDonald, Gartner Research Vice President, Distinguished Analyst and Fellow pointed out several years ago, long before current technologies made the Cloud even more secure, “Don’t make the mistake of automatically believing the conventional wisdom that cloud-based computing will be less secure. Well-managed cloud service providers won’t be.”

Criteria #3: Mobility

Workers should be able to access business applications and data, anytime, anywhere in the world, via any device. This capability a key to capturing the benefits of a modern business, and numerous surveys prove it.

According to a 2013 survey by Dell, more than two-thirds of businesses see boosts in employee productivity and customer response time when they implement BYOD (bring your own devices) policies that support a mobile workforce. More than half of those firms feel they would be at a competitive disadvantage without such policies.

Furthermore, it is well documented that millennials—who will compose the majority of the U.S. workforce by the end of this decade—will hesitate or even refuse to work for companies that do not support a mobile workplace. Such round-the-clock **mobility** can be difficult without cloud computing. The dynamics of business today require continual refreshes of documents, key applications and other data, so it’s no longer practical for workers to rely on cached files and folders stored on their devices. Additionally, while it is possible for a company to set up its own virtual private network tied to on-premise resources, those resources must remain available around the clock to support 24/7 mobility.

Most onsite environments are subject to power and Internet outages. In-house VPNs are also expensive and complicated to deploy and manage, and access will still need to be channeled over the Internet—in other words, through the network Cloud.

The Cloud Is Calling

By now, I hope I have excited you about the possibilities of the “Big Three” criteria we established for the modern business. I also hope I have established a firm connection between achieving those goals and moving to the Cloud. The only question left to answer, from my perspective, is, “Why now?”

The answer is, “Because your competitors are moving there, if they haven’t already.” Cloud adoption passed the “tipping point” in 2013, growing by 90 percent between January 2012 and June 2013. Simply put, the Cloud is unavoidable for any firm that wishes to remain competitive, and any additional expenditure on in-house infrastructure are investments in a static platform.

In reality, there is a very good chance that your firm is already using some form of Cloud computing, even if you do not know it. The question then becomes, when you will maximize your cost and resource savings, minimize your risk and accelerate your productivity by taking a bigger leap?

In future articles, I will be diving into the main components of Availability, Security and Mobility. The goal of this series is to further educate the C-level executive on Modern Business Technology.

DynaSis is an Atlanta IT services and cloud computing provider for small and mid-sized businesses. All of our solutions focus on helping companies achieve the three fundamental IT necessities of the modern business—availability, security and mobility. We specialize in on-demand and on-premise managed IT services, managed cloud infrastructure, desktops and backups, and professional hardware and equipment installation. For more information about DynaSis’ IT support and services, visit www.dynasis.com.