



Is the sky the limit for the cloud?

Andy Fenton reminds us just how fast cloud (Internet-based) computing is moving.

Cloud computing has achieved a meteoric rise in the world of document management.

The advantages of the cloud, Internet-based computing, include considerable cost-savings with “pay as you go” service plans; scalability of resource procurement in response to needed IT capacity; accessibility of services often from any networked machine; collaboration capabilities with access to shared applications and records; flexibility to produce resources on demand and capacity to outsource large computing needs and non-critical applications.

All the indications are that cloud computing will swiftly become an inherent part of IT systems – so what does this mean for information management?

I’m a director of two companies, Desktop Imaging and New Zealand Micrographic Services, specialising in records digitisation and information management systems, so cloud computing is of great interest to me. Both companies are looking to expand services nationwide and operate through Internet access (the cloud) rather than a remote server that will give our staff and our customers a level of flexibility that can only increase productivity and results.

The cloud will allow our scanning technicians to work with just their laptops but still have full access to all our files – providing significantly increased business agility, as well as flexibility for our customers.

With the core of our service based on business continuity, cloud computing provides an extra insurance. It offers higher security from computer-related hazards such as viruses and, importantly, from physical hazards such as earthquakes, floods and fires.

Obviously, following the recent

Christchurch earthquakes this message only reinforces the need for IT infrastructure to be protected off site, if businesses are to be able to get quickly back on their feet and remain productive following a natural disaster.

Then there are the financial advantages. Because the cloud has huge economies of scale, it can deliver almost unlimited storage capacity at much lower prices.

A recent report released by the Centre for Economic and Business Research and commissioned by American data-storage giant EMC states that across Europe’s five largest economies (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK) the “widespread adoption of cloud computing has the potential to generate over £763 billion of cumulative economic benefits over the period 2010 to 2015”.

Cloud is also good for businesses that are growing and often face considerable capital outlay to achieve their goals. Cloud computing reduces costs around IT infrastructure and eliminates the need for IT support staff and physical servers. I know from our own perspective, it’s a significant driver in growth strategy.

So the sky seems the limit for the cloud and it is gaining momentum – a survey of 1500 members of the Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA), a non-profit association of 86,000 global IT professionals, found that 33 percent were already using the cloud.

Some of the world’s biggest organisations are already forging ahead with cloud. The most high-profile example is, of course, the Obama administration, which has taken a “cloud first” approach encouraging federal agencies to adopt safe and secure cloud-based solutions for a wide range

of activities. The federal General Services Administration has moved its primary information to a cloud-based host. The upgrade took just one day, rather than months, realising savings of US\$1.7 million in hosting services annually.

But, like most developments in the online world, the cloud is still evolving and consequently it’s provoking considerable debate across businesses and in the pages of IT publications. The New Zealand Inland Revenue Department recently issued an alert reminding business that with cloud computing their data might be stored anywhere on the planet – but by law, they must keep their tax records in this country.

However, it also noted: “Using cloud computing to back-up business records will not breach record keeping obligations, provided the primary business records are stored in New Zealand.” It suggested businesses may need to obtain assurance from their service providers that their data will primarily be stored locally.

Our companies are ensuring we keep abreast of the latest developments around cloud, particularly with regard to safety and security, and are taking a balanced approach to identifying and assess any risks and advantages. That way we can help our customers get the best out of cloud computing. So what do you think, is the sky the limit for the cloud?

“CLOUD COMPUTING REDUCES COSTS AROUND IT INFRASTRUCTURE AND ELIMINATES THE NEED FOR IT SUPPORT STAFF AND PHYSICAL SERVERS.”

Andy Fenton is a director of Desktop Imaging Ltd and New Zealand Micrographic Services.

