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Cloud computing offers cheap solutions

The convenience of remote file access and workflow management is no longer restricted to only those businesses who can afford expensive enterprise-level



Jason Anderson

software solutions and the developed information technology departments needed to keep it all running smoothly.

You can leverage some of the same efficiencies for your business using some simple and inexpensive cloud computing applications. Unless you have been asleep for the past few years, you probably have

heard about 'the cloud' and how it is revolutionizing business operations.

Cloud computing is simply the use of an Internet connection to access and modify information stored on a computer located somewhere else on the Internet. The information is passed from the remote computer (usually a web server) to the local computer (called the client) only for viewing and processing by the user. All storage remains on the remote computer.

Cloud computing can take many forms, including the increasingly popular web-based email. Two less-utilized cloud computing functions include web-based file storage and web-based workflow man-

agement.

File storage on a web server allows for remote access to the files from anywhere an Internet connection can be found and can double as an off-site file backup. Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) is one example that offers free and paid accounts for file storage, synchronization and backup.

You can install a client application that integrates with your computer's file system and allows you to store files on Dropbox's web server by copying those files to a designated folder on your computer's hard drive. The files are then uploaded to the web server automatically in the background, allowing you to focus on other tasks.

You can then access those files from any other computer or mobile device with Internet access. Dropbox also offers sharing capabilities that allow you to choose who can access those remotely stored files. You can download or delete your files at any time.

Other web-based cloud applications go beyond storage, synchronization and sharing to offer workflow management.

Box (www.box.net) is similar to Dropbox but has more functionality. You can create and edit shared web documents. Box also offers integration with Salesforce.com and other cloud services.

Another web-based suite, Google Docs (docs.google.com), allows co-workers to collaborate on the same

document without having to worry about keeping a file updated as it is passed from person to person via email. Collaborators simply access the shared file and use one of the web-based office applications to edit it.

Google Docs offers you the ability to create and edit word processing documents, presentations, spreadsheets, forms and collections, all from within your web browser. Any modifications are saved on the web server and are instantly available. You can restrict file access to specific people or groups.

Both Box and Google Docs offer free and paid accounts.

Applications such as Dropbox, Box, and Google Docs offer you the abil-

ity to work from multiple locations without having to store and keep up with multiple local files. You can share files and collaborate with employees, contractors, customers, vendors and strategic partners.

These are just a few of many cloud computing applications that enable increased workplace efficiency and convenience. Try out a few different applications to determine which will satisfy your needs. By having your head in the clouds, you can save time and effort.

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