



# **A Guide to Choosing the right Cloud Provider**

How to empower your business with a better cloud

# Building Better a Better Cloud

Poll a room of top IT leaders from technology-driven companies and you will hear a clear consensus: IT directors who are not using the cloud are losing ground and are at risk of quickly becoming irrelevant.

The increased operational and cost efficiencies offered to companies through cloud make it easy to show value back to the business once cloud is instituted. Elasticity, flexibility and on-demand resources have long been touted cloud benefits, and as use cases have expanded and matured; those benefits are becoming more poignant. Immediate access to resources means midmarket companies can scale up or down without major capital investments and they can adopt new technologies without having to worry about obsolete equipment, upgrades and retrofits.

Moving to the cloud has many benefits; however, it is not easy. A critical component of a having a successful cloud strategy is choosing the correct provider for your business in the first place. This guide will help you understand what you should consider when choosing a cloud provider.

## Your Cloud Provider checklist

- 1. What type of cloud service do you need?** – By listing which applications you have on cloud you can understand which cloud providers might be right for you
- 2. What pricing structure suits you?** –Understanding if you want a usage based price or an all-encompassing price is important
- 3. How important is Security to you?** – What security features can you cloud provider offer?
- 4. Where is your data and how safe is it?** – Is your data required to be in region or in country for compliance or legal reasons? Will accessibility of data be impacted by its location?
- 5. What customer service is offered?** – What support is being offered? What are the response times and SLA's?
- 6. How will you migrate to the Cloud?** – Not all cloud initiatives end well. A major consideration is how will you get your data to the cloud, setup the VPN's, and build your applications.

## 1 What Cloud Services do you need?

Knowing what cloud services you need will dictate which providers you will use. There are software-based cloud offerings, such as Dropbox for online document, photo and video storage. Intuit offers QuickBooks for online accounting. And there's Salesforce for online customer relationship management (CRM). If you are just looking for a test and development platform there is AWS and there is Azure for email.



However, if you need more than basic data storage and messaging and are looking to migrate your business critical applications to the cloud then you need more than a commodity cloud. You need a Cloud Infrastructure that is highly secure, redundant and most of all one with the highest level of support. After all, your whole business will be running on this technology platform.

## 2 What is the price structure?

This is a big one. Especially for companies in the Middle East who traditionally raise purchase orders for projects and services that are fixed.

Many global mega cloud providers prefer to charge just for usage in a similar way to mobile phone bills. Why? Well they know that once a VM is powered up it will hardly ever be turned off. They understand data will grow exponentially over time. In addition providers also make it cheap to upload data to the cloud but then expensive to download the data. All this means this time of consumption based billing can appear to be very cheap since costs such as bandwidth and data are usually not reflected until after the service is commissioned.

Our advice is to understand exactly what you will require and agree a fixed all-encompassing price. In the long run it will be much, much more affordable. When you see, Cloud Instances advertised from 8 USD... do not be fooled. That same VM could end up costing you more than 1000USD a month by the time data transfer, CPU usage, Ram, Licenses, Support, etc have been added... usually to your company credit card.

### 3 How secure you want your cloud?

Not all clouds are created equal. Things you should consider:

1. Is 2 Factor Authentication possible?
2. Is anti-malware scanning and blocking enabled by default?
3. Who is responsible for applying security patches?
4. Does your provider offer you your own virtual router, firewall and switching environment or just Virtual Machines?
5. Is Data at rest encryption possible or just data in transit?
6. Is security alerting possible? I.e. if you have multiple failed logon attempts is there any alerting?
7. Can you upgrade to a secured service which your environment is monitored 24x7 for Security Incident and Events? Can they escalate incidents back to your team in real time?
8. If you're hosting web services or ecommerce what security do they have specific for this?
9. Do they have CDN available for ecommerce sites to protect against DDOS attacks?
10. Can they provide in Geo Resilient Cloud hosting?
11. Is their cloud and their process audited by anyone?
12. Can you audit it?

#### Important

Commodity cloud does not come with security by default. A quick internet search will highlight the many hacks and attacks on companies hosted in some of the major providers. In these cases setting up security and the correct backup procedure is down to the customer. If a control panel is compromised and a huge bill is run up, the responsibility is with the customer to pay those bills. Even worse, in these circumstances if the hacker wants to cause malicious harm, data and backups can be deleted leading in some documented cases to the closure of those businesses.

If you are concerned about security, consider using a provider who can also offer a managed security service. In addition, consider backing up critical data to a secure vault that cannot be accessed except in an emergency where access is only possible being physically at the vault (i.e. not via the net) – this is your doomsday insurance. Some providers offer this or you can do it yourself. Being taken off line is bad, not being able to recover is fatal.

## 4 Where is your Data stored?

Data Sovereignty is a dynamic topic. Currently, information about residents in the UAE should stay in the UAE. Information regarding government projects should stay within the UAE. The law is developing to take into account new cloud technologies and one should be conscious of this and take it into account for their cloud strategy.

Hosting data that a company needs regular access to in different continents may cause performance issues. Using an in region provider can cut these latency times down from 250ms to 15ms or less, making a noticeable difference in performance. This may not make that much difference for email but it will when it comes to ERP applications.

### Other considerations:

If you're looking for a local cloud provider, where are their data centers? What level of accreditation do those data centers have? Have there been any significant outages in those DC's like a fire or a flood in the past few years?

## 5 What support is offered?

Without exception, technical support should be available to you online or by phone 24 hours a day, every day, including holidays. But how easy is it to speak to someone who can assist your quickly and knowledgably? Be sure to check the SLA's offered.

Commodity cloud providers will have millions of customers. Consider if they will be best placed to assist you in a timely fashion or more importantly during a critical issues. There are providers who offer managed services on top of commodity cloud providers, generally they usually provide a better level of support services. However, this is all reactive.

Some cloud providers offer a managed service on top of their cloud environment. In these cases lines are monitored, patching is done proactively, 24x7 alerting is available with escalation. Maybe a managed service overlay would be a valuable addition to a cloud strategy. This would free up your current IT to focus on things other than running infrastructure.

## 6 How will you migrate to the cloud?

Migrating to the cloud is not easy.

Many hyper scale providers, or commodity cloud providers, send their customers a CD with a config file for their firewalls to setup their VPN along with instructions on how to use their infrastructure. This may suit developers but some customers prefer a managed onboarding process.

Companies should consider engaging with a cloud provider who will do a discovery session of their on-premise environment and highlight any potential issues for certain applications moving to the cloud. It is also advisable to negotiate a free Proof of Concept to make sure you are satisfied with the performance of all your applications on cloud.

Finally if you have more than 1TB of data it will likely be necessary to pre-seed this to the cloud. Cloud providers may do this for you or ask you copy the data onto removable media and send it to them. The question is, how

## Conclusion

Now that your checklist is in place, get started! Confidence in continuity begins with a plan that works.

With cloud, if your company experiences rapid growth, you have the resources to expand instantly. The price point is compelling because it beats legacy prices with physical equipment. It also means you will never have to spend on OPEX again and your team is free from the daily chore of keeping the lights on.

If you would like help assessing your cloud strategy CloudHPT is ready to help.

### 10 reasons why you should consider CloudHPT for Secured Cloud Services

1. Secured Cloud Service that are Cisco powered and certified
2. Bespoke builds possible
3. All in one pricing – no surprises.
4. UAE NOC and SOC that runs 24x7
5. Datacenters in Dubai and Abu Dhabi
6. In Region Professional Services for discovery and migration
7. Easy-to-use management portal
8. Comprehensive testing and validation of DR
9. 24/7/365 proactive support team
10. Audited Environment and process for compliance