

FREE REPORT:

FACTS TO KNOW BEFORE MOVING TO THE CLOUD



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WHY WE CREATED THIS REPORT AND WHO SHOULD READ IT

If you're like most firms these days, you're considering transitioning your network and operations to the cloud, you probably want real answers to your questions and concerns over security, cost and if it's the best choice for your organization.

That's why we created this report. We wanted to give CEOs and managers a simple, straightforward guide that not only answers your questions, but also provides vital experience-based information that other IT companies either don't know or may not tell you.

My name is Reed Wilson. My organization, Palmetto Technology Group, has been recognized twice by Microsoft as their Cloud Partner of the Year. We have migrated more 1,100 small business and more than 125,000 end users to the 'Cloud'. We started helping companies move their operations to the Cloud back in 2010. We have learned a lot during that time, both what works and what doesn't work. Perhaps most importantly, I am a business owner myself and I understand it's my job to make my employees as productive as possible while mitigating risks in our business. In many cases, the 'Cloud' is perfect for accomplishing that goal.



SCOPE:

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This report will arm you with the facts you need to avoid expensive, time-consuming mistakes.

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Cloud computing is not a good fit for every company. If you don't get all the facts or fully understand the pros and cons, you can end up making some poor (and expensive!) decisions you'll regret later. This report will arm you with the facts you need to avoid expensive, time-consuming mistakes.

Of course, we are always available as a resource for a second opinion, network assessment or quick question. Please feel free to contact me if we can clarify any points made in this report or answer any questions you have.

Hope this report helps you,

Reed Wilson
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5 FACTS BEFORE MOVING TO THE CLOUD

In this report, I will lay out 5 facts you need to know before you consider cloud computing for your company:

1. The pros and cons you need to consider before moving to the cloud
2. Migration mistakes (and how to avoid them)
3. The various types of cloud computing options available to you
4. Answers to frequently asked questions
5. What you need to ask your IT provider before letting them move all or a part of your business to the cloud



REAL COST COMPARISON:

I've also included a sample cost-comparison chart so you can see the impact this new technology can have on your IT budget and bottom line.

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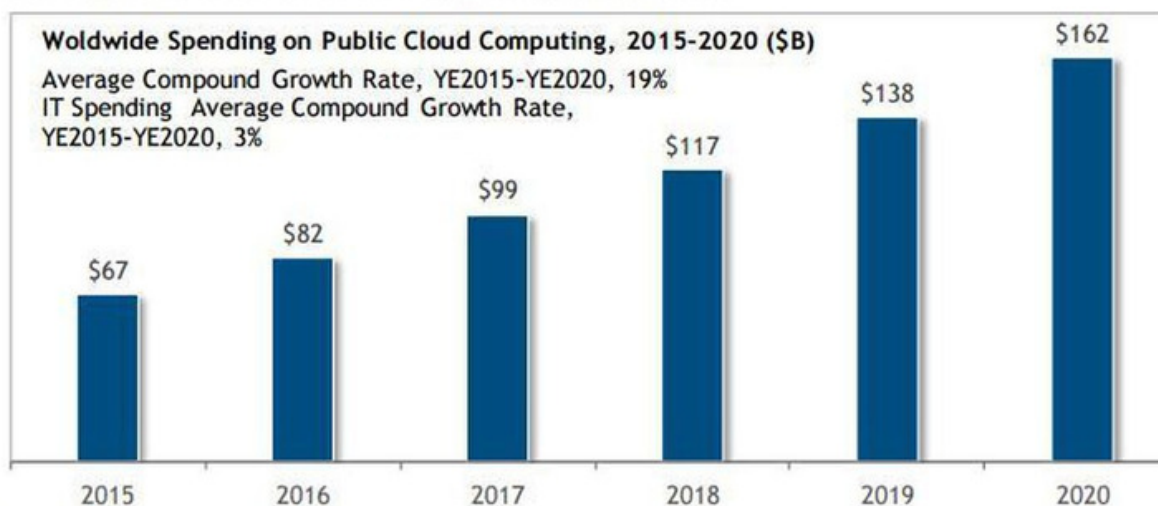
WHAT IS CLOUD COMPUTING?

You're probably already experiencing the benefits of cloud computing in some way. These are some of the cloud computing applications you may be using:

- * Gmail, Hotmail or other free e-mail accounts
- * Social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.)
- * NetSuite, Salesforce
- * Constant Contact, Exact Target, Mailchimp or other e-mail broadcasting services
- * All things Google (search, AdWords, maps, etc.)

When you think about it, almost every single application you use today can be (or already is) being put “in the cloud” where you can access it using your browser and pay a monthly fee (like a utility). You don't purchase and install software, but instead, access what you need via an Internet browser.

The Rapid Growth of Cloud Computing, 2015-2020



Source: IDC, 2016

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WHAT ABOUT OFFICE 365 & GOOGLE APPS?

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

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Google makes its money from advertising. Microsoft makes its money from productivity software.

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Office 365 and Google Apps are perfect examples of the cloud computing trend. For an inexpensive monthly fee, you can get full access and use of Office applications that used to cost a few hundred dollars to purchase. And, since these apps are being powered by your cloud provider, you don't need an expensive desktop with lots of power to use them – just a simple Internet connection will do on a laptop, desktop, tablet, or smartphone.

Google Apps made a big splash a few years back by offering 'free' versions of their software. A lot of small businesses made the switch only to discover that free does not always mean “best.” Unless you are a micro business or a business with little complexity, Google Apps may not have all the functionality you need.

Office 365, is built on top of the Microsoft Office products that you're likely already familiar with, like Outlook, Excel, Word, PowerPoint, etc. And it extends well past that, including options like cloud storage, communication & meeting hubs (like Teams) VOIP telephony (phone systems that work over your computer).

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PROS AND CONS OF MOVING TO THE CLOUD:

"The best option for you may be a hybrid solution, where some of your applications and functionality are in the cloud and some are still hosted and maintained from an in-house server."

As you read the next section, keep in mind there is no "perfect" solution. All options – be it an in-house, on prem server or a cloud solution – have upsides and downsides that need to be evaluated on a case-by-case scenario.

The best option for you may be a hybrid solution, where some of your applications and functionality are in the cloud and some are still hosted and maintained from an in-house server. We'll discuss more of this in a later section.

PROS OF CLOUD COMPUTING

1. **Lowered IT costs** - this is probably the single most compelling reason why companies choose to move their network (all or in part) to the cloud. Not only do you save money on software licenses, but on hardware (servers and workstations) as well as on IT support and upgrades. In fact, we save our clients an average of 20-30% when we move some or part of their network functionality to the cloud.
2. **Ability to access** your desktop and/or applications **from anywhere** and **on any device**.
3. **Disaster recovery and backup are automated** - the server in your office is vulnerable to several threats, including viruses, human error, hardware failure, software corruption and, of course, physical damage due to a fire, flood or other natural disasters.
4. **It's faster and easier** to set up new employees.
5. **You use it without having to "own" it** - you don't own the responsibility of having to install, update and maintain the infrastructure.
6. **It's a "greener" tech** that will save on power and your electric bill.

If you're building your business and don't want the heavy outlay of cash for purchasing and supporting an expensive computer network. The cloud is built to scale with you.

CONS OF CLOUD COMPUTING

1. The Internet going down - while you can mitigate this risk by using a commercial-grade Internet connection and maintaining a second backup connection, there is a chance you'll lose Internet connectivity, making it impossible to access files stored in the cloud. Most 'old school' IT consultants will use this as the biggest fear factor. While it is certainly a risk, the risk is considerably lower than it was just a few years back.
2. Data security - If you don't feel comfortable having your data in some off-site location. This is a valid concern, and before you choose any cloud provider, you need to find out more information about where they are storing your data, how it's encrypted, who has access and how you can recover it.
3. Business applications that won't work in the cloud - some legacy systems that function in a 'client-server' environment are typically not great candidates for Cloud Computing. Recently, though, new iterations of the Cloud have made this easier to achieve. The important thing is to do your homework before you write the check.
4. Compliance Issues: There are several laws and compliance frameworks, like HMDA, PCI-DSS, SOX and GDPR, designed around data privacy and security that require companies to control and protect their data and certify that they have knowledge and control over who can access the data, who sees it and how and where it is stored. In a public cloud environment, this can be a problem.

Industry leaders in cloud service have addressed compliance. For example, Microsoft has compliance programs for financial and healthcare services, among others.

MIGRATION MISTAKES!

What you need to know about moving to a cloud-based network.

When done right, a migration to Office 365 or another cloud solution should be like any other migration. There's planning that needs to be done, prerequisites that must be determined and the inevitable "quirks" that need to be ironed out once you make the move.

Every company has its own unique environment, so it's practically impossible to try and plan for every potential pitfall; however, here are some BIG things you want to ask your IT provider about BEFORE making the leap:

1. **Downtime:** Some organizations cannot afford ANY downtime, while others can do without their network for a day or two. Make sure you communicate your specific needs regarding downtime and make sure your IT provider has a solid plan to prevent extended downtime.
2. **Painfully Slow Performance:** Ask your IT consultant if there's any way you can run your network in a test environment before making the full migration. Imagine how frustrated you would be if you migrate your network and discover everything is running so slowly you can barely work! Again, every environment is slightly different, so it's best to test before you transition.
3. **3rd-Party Applications:** If your organization has plug-ins to Exchange for faxing, voicemail or integration into other applications, make sure you test them to see if they will still work in the new environment.

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CLOUD VS. TRADITIONAL NETWORKS

A comparison of costs

Each client has a unique set of circumstances and needs that will factor into the cost savings and benefits. However, in order to give you an idea of what you can save when moving your network to the cloud, we've put together a common business scenario and the savings obtained with cloud computing.

ACME Consulting: This is a professional services firm with 25 employees all using Microsoft Office. Other applications being used include QuickBooks, Microsoft Exchange, SharePoint, Goldmine, and Teams.

Item	Traditional Network Cost Over 3 Years	Cloud Network Cost Over 3 Years
Hardware		
Server 1 – Domain Controller/File Server	\$3000	\$13608
Server 2 – QuickBooks and Goldmine	\$3000	\$13608
Server 3 – SharePoint and Exchange	\$4500	\$0
Software		
Microsoft Operating System	\$3499	\$0
Microsoft Office Licenses	\$12,700	\$11,250 (includes SharePoint, Office Licenses, and Exchange)
Exchange Server	708	\$0
Exchange User Licenses	\$1,950	\$0
SharePoint	\$6,798	\$0
Antivirus	\$900	\$900
Spam Filtering	\$900	\$900
Other Costs		
Firewall	\$3,300	\$2,700
Backup (on-site and off-site)	\$10,800	\$0
Storage	\$2,500	\$0
Total Costs	\$54,555	\$42,966
Savings:	\$11,589	

** Please note, we've shown this over a three-year period since that is the normal span of time when all workstations and servers need to be replaced and software needs upgrading. This also doesn't include cost of electricity, as that can vary widely based on your utility company.*

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COUNTING THE COSTS

As you can see, the cost savings are often compelling enough for business owners to make the migration to cloud computing. Although, the economics of Cloud Computing are often exaggerated by most IT Consultants.

Cloud Computing CAN save you money, but cost savings should not be your only driver. Over the course of three years, the costs are not super dramatic. However, when you couple the cost savings with the increases in efficiency, productivity, higher levels of security and features, and avoiding a disruptive upgrade cycle every three years, Cloud Computing DOES make a lot of sense.

Especially when you factor in that most Cloud Services require less IT support than an on-premises system, the savings can add up quickly!



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TYPES OF CLOUD SOLUTIONS EXPLAINED

“Cloud computing is not a one-size-fits-all solution.”

PURE CLOUD - this is where all your applications and data are put on the other side of the firewall (in the cloud) and accessed through various devices (laptops, desktops, iPads, phones) via the Internet.

HYBRID CLOUD - enables you to put certain pieces of existing IT infrastructure (say, storage and e-mail) in the cloud, and the remainder of the IT infrastructure stays on-premises. This gives you the ability to enjoy the cost savings and benefits of cloud computing without migrating your entire environment.

PUBLIC VS PRIVATE CLOUD - A public cloud is a service that anyone can tap into with a network connection and a credit card. They are shared infrastructures that allow you to pay-as-you-go and are managed through a self-service web portal. Private clouds are essentially self-built infrastructures that mimic public cloud services but are on-premises. Private clouds are often the choice of companies who want the benefits of cloud computing, but don't want their data kept in a public environment.

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FAQS

SECURITY + DATA LOCATION + CONNECTIVITY

QUESTION - How long will it take to transition my on-premises server to the cloud, and what's the process?

We have moved customers with 1,100 users in less than a week, while some customers with only 20 employees took a month. The first customer was just migrating email and the second customer was migrating their entire network. *What* you're moving has just as much effect on the process as how many employees you have.

QUESTION - What if my Internet connection goes down? How will we be able to work?

This is a valid concern. If you require 100% uptime, then you should invest in an additional internet service provider. If you think that is too expensive (a basic cable connection or DSL connection will be less than \$50-100/month), then you may not really need 100% uptime.

QUESTION - What happens if the Internet slows to the point where it's difficult to work productively?

This is a very rare occurrence. In most cases, we find the reason the internet is running slowly is employees streaming music/videos/games or downloading extremely large files over the internet. We recommend a firewall that can help you pinpoint those instances, and in some cases, block it entirely.

FACT: Most security breaches are due to human error, or because the company didn't maintain their network with security updates.

FAQS CONT.

SECURITY + DATA LOCATION + CONNECTIVITY

QUESTION - What about security? Isn't there a big risk of someone accessing my data if it's in the cloud?

In many cases, cloud computing is a MORE secure way of accessing and storing data. Just because your server is on-site doesn't make it more secure. In fact, most small to medium businesses can't justify the cost of securing their network the way a cloud provider can.

QUESTION - What if I change my cloud service provider? How do I get my data back?

We give every client network documentation that clearly outlines where their data is and how they could get it back in the event of an emergency. This includes emergency contact numbers, detailed information on how to access your data and infrastructure without needing our assistance (although our plan is to always be there to support you). A copy of our insurance policy and information regarding your backups and licensing is also provided to you. You should never hire ANY IT service who won't give you information on where your data is located and how to get it back.

QUESTION - Do I have to purchase new hardware (servers, workstations) to move to the cloud?

No! That's one of the benefits of cloud computing. It allows you to use older workstations, laptops and servers because the computing power is in the cloud. Not only does that allow you to keep and use hardware longer, but it allows you to buy cheaper workstations and laptops because you don't need the expensive computing power required in the past.

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WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN HIRING AN IT CONSULTANT

Unfortunately, the IT consulting industry (along with many others) has its own share of incompetent or unethical people who will try to take advantage of trusting business owners who don't know when they are being taken advantage of. Sometimes this is out of greed for your money; more often it's because they don't have the skills and competency to do the job right but won't tell you that up front because they want to make the sale.

From misleading information, unqualified technicians and poor data management, to terrible customer service, we've had a number of customers come to us to clean up the disaster a less experienced IT consultant caused.

Automotive repair shops, electricians, plumbers, lawyers, realtors, dentists, doctors, accountants – almost every other service industry, is heavily regulated to protect the consumer from receiving substandard work or getting ripped off. However, the computer technology industry is still mostly unregulated and there are few laws in existence to protect you, the consumer – **which is why it's so important for you to really research the company or person you are considering, to make sure they have the experience to set up, migrate and support your network to the cloud.**

Anyone can promote themselves as a "cloud expert." Even if they are honestly trying to do a good job for you, their inexperience can cost you dearly in your network's speed and performance or worse, in lost, stolen or corrupt data files.

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QUESTIONS TO ASK AN IT COMPANY BEFORE THEY TOUCH YOUR NETWORK

QUESTION - How many clients have they provided cloud services for to date and can they provide references?

You don't want someone practicing on your network. At a minimum, make sure they have certifications from the vendor they are implementing (Google/Microsoft/Amazon). Also, ask them for specific references (at least a few!) who have implemented their solution.

QUESTION - How quickly do they guarantee to have a technician working on an outage or other problem?

Anyone you pay to support your network should give you a written SLA (service level agreement) outlining exactly how IT issues get resolved and in what time frame. You should also ask what their average resolution time has been with current clients over the last three to six months. **They should also answer their phones live from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and provide you with an emergency after-hours number you may call if a problem arises, including on weekends and holidays.** If you cannot access your network because the Internet is down or due to some other problem, you can't be waiting around for hours for someone to call you back OR (more importantly) start working on resolving the issue. **Make sure you get this in writing** - often cheaper or less experienced consultants won't have this or will try and convince you it's not important or that they can't do this. Don't buy that excuse! They are in the business of providing IT support, so they should have some guarantees or standards around this that they are willing to share with you.

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QUESTIONS TO ASK CONT.

QUESTION - What's their plan for transitioning your network to the cloud to minimize problems and downtime?

Like anything else in business, a migration to the cloud should be fully planned out and shared with you. The plan should be tailored to your company to ensure that migrating does not cause a disruption to your day-to-day business. Your old network shouldn't be "turned off" until everyone, especially you, are 100% confident that everything has been transitioned and is working correctly. If your IT provider isn't willing to share their migration plan with you, take that as a big red flag.

QUESTION - Do they provide a no-risk trial of your network in the cloud to test the proof of concept BEFORE you commit to a long-term contract?

It's important to test a solution in your network before committing to it. A cloud server may sound perfect for your business but if you get it set up, then discover it doesn't work for you for some reason, you're in for a long, expensive headache.

QUESTION - Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak)?

Your IT provider should be able to explain to you what they're doing to YOUR network and should never make you feel stupid for asking. They should have good customer service skills in addition to technical skills. As with any vendor, you should look for someone you enjoy working with (along with their ability to get the job done)!

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Your IT provider should own the problem, so you don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on your own – that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.

MORE QUESTIONS TO ASK

QUESTION - Where will your data be stored?

You should receive full documentation about where your data is, how it's being secured and backed up and how you could get access to it if necessary, WITHOUT going through your provider. Essentially, you don't want your cloud provider to be able to hold your data (and your company) hostage.

QUESTION - How will your data be secured and backed up?

If they tell you that your data will be stored in their own co-lo in the back of their office, what happens if THEY get destroyed by a fire, flood or other disaster? What are they doing to secure the office and access? Are they backing it up somewhere else? **Make sure they are SAS 70 certified** and have a failover plan in place to ensure continuous service if their location goes down. If they are building on another platform, you still want to find out where your data is and how it's being backed up.

QUESTION - Do they have adequate errors-and-omissions insurance and workers' compensation insurance?

Here's something to consider: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days or to lose data, who's responsible? Here's another question to consider: if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office, who's paying? In this litigious society we live in, make sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors-and-omissions insurance and workers' compensation – and don't be shy about asking to see their latest insurance policies! Make sure they have insurance that covers YOU!

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MORE QUESTIONS TO ASK CONT.

QUESTION - Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with written network documentation detailing what software licenses you own, your critical passwords, user information, hardware inventory, etc., or are they the only person with the “keys to the kingdom”?

All clients should receive this in electronic form at no additional cost.

QUESTION - Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?

If your IT provider only has one person familiar with your network, what happens when something breaks when that person is out the office - or even worse, leaves the company? Any IT provider should have a team of people (along with extensive documentation) who know your network. This way, you're always covered, no matter who on their team is working, or not working that day.

QUESTION - Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in ongoing training – or are they learning on your dime?

Technicians should never be learning by trial and error with your network and data. They should also be up to the date on their certifications. Technology is constantly evolving. Their knowledge base should be evolving with it to make sure they know what they're doing - no matter if your business is running the latest and greatest software or an older system.

Your IT provider should be familiar with your line-of-business applications. If they aren't, how are they going to provide the best solution for you? No one should move or touch your network without first fully understanding how it will affect the applications that are critical to your business operations.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY

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*If you're so fed up from being “sold” that you don't trust anyone. **I don't blame you.***

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If you're like several CEOs we've helped, you've already been burned, disappointed and frustrated by the questionable advice and complete lack of service you've gotten from other IT companies.

Even if you decide not to move your network to the cloud or engage with us as a client, you'll find the information we share with you to be extremely valuable and eye-opening when you make future decisions about your IT infrastructure.

And remember, it never hurts to get a third-party “checkup” of your network's security, backups and stability, as well as a competitive cost analysis.

Reach out to me anytime,

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