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More institutions are moving to the cloud

Benefits go far beyond cost savings

Why are more institutions moving their key systems to the cloud?

When we speak to institutions, their motivations tend to fall into three categories: fundamental, functional and financial. Fundamentally, it may be time for an operating system upgrade from an aging system that's costing a lot of maintenance and management overhead in space and power. Functionally, they may be looking for expanded internet, bandwidth, backup or recovery capability, or they may have unsecured space, unmonitored buildings, or lack of cooling or electrical capacity. And financially, the cloud offers cost savings by repurposing the people who are managing, maintaining and monitoring systems.

What are some specific advantages of cloud-based systems?

Scalability is one of the biggest advantages for higher education institutions. Also, speed of deploying new systems or new resources, whether it's memory, disk space, additional servers, or better or more reliable infrastructure. Security is also a big advantage for our schools. Systems in the cloud typically have better intrusion detection, better firewall monitoring and management, and they're monitored 24/7. Data centers replace their infrastructure every two to three years to run on new and faster equipment, so institutions don't have to do any hardware upgrades or migrations. Another advantage is that commercial data centers are certified for PCI and HIPAA and ISO 27001, and they have annual SOC 1, 2 and 3 audits.

Talk about some of the operating efficiencies that come with Jenzabar's cloud-based services.

Jenzabar uses only tier 3 or tier 4 data centers, which are N plus one redundant. Our infrastructure has a parallel design and can be worked on, upgraded or replaced without any down time. Standard failover and high availabilities are built in, so if a server crashes, everything continues to run without any need for customer involvement.

What are some of the key factors to consider before moving systems to the cloud?

Determine your current environment with a thorough analysis. Know which different pieces of software you're licensed for and that they're transferable to the cloud. Identify all of your systems. Build a good test plan and prepare to set aside some time to test things out. We always recommend that customers replicate their LDAP or Active Directory in the cloud so that if there are any issues on their current local environment it doesn't affect the users in the cloud. That way, if something is wrong with their local Active Directory they can still use the cloud Active Directory in conjunction with their local environment.

Are there any other secrets to a smooth transition to the cloud?

Make sure to thoroughly review what the cloud provider's costs are going to be. Very often providers quote only server costs, but particularly in higher education, you need more than servers. You need a firewall, anti-virus, you may need a VPN tunnel for encryption, there may be data communication and backups charges, and there might be other monthly recurring charges.

Make sure your provider is experienced. We've been doing this for more than eight years and have more than 175 clients in the cloud, which gives us a very good idea of what the resource requirements are. This experience allows us to be flexible and to build models specifically for each institution. We have a SaaS model, we have a hosting model, and then we have something in between. We have the ability to go completely SaaS or we can go just hosting, and we have several other levels in between those based on each customer's needs.

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