

How to Recognize True Cloud-based Dental Software

Unfortunately for consumers, the term “cloud” is often used by software developers to describe any functionality their product may have within a web browser. As a result, today, you have several dental software companies that have placed the word “cloud” after their product name, when their products are not true cloud-based applications.

But how does one tell the difference? And is one better than the other? In this paper, we’ll explain the differences between ASP and true-cloud based applications and then present an argument why a true-cloud based application is better than an ASP application.

ASP Defined

ASP is an acronym for Application Service Provider. An ASP is a software delivery method by which a software developer installs an existing product (like practice management software) on a server and allows customers to access it through the internet.

Cloud Defined

The cloud, or more accurately Software as a Service (SaaS), is a software distribution method in which software (like practice management software) is specifically developed for a web browser and accessed via the internet.

Why a True Cloud is Better than an ASP

At first glance, SaaS and ASP appear interchangeable. Before we address this misconception, let’s explore why true cloud-based software is better than ASP software.



Why a True Cloud is Better than an ASP (continued)



1. ASP is older technology zip-tied to the internet

Generally speaking, a software company does not develop software specifically for an ASP. If you were a software developer and wanted to build new practice management software, you would build it specifically for the cloud. But if you are a software developer with existing, older software, the kind developed for a local server, an ASP allows you to make it available via the internet.

Let's be clear. When software is deployed through an ASP, it's because the software developer doesn't want to take the time to re-architect the software to be a true cloud-based application. It's a thinly-veiled attempt to compete on the cloud. Regardless, the software will lack the performance and efficiencies enjoyed by true cloud-based software, which we'll discuss further.

2. ASP is not designed for the internet

The key to great software is user experience. Older dental software can be characterized by an overuse of toolbars and buttons, which dates back to the 1990s. Most of us have extensive experience using the internet and are accustomed to a simpler, more refined look and feel when browsing. We expect a website to be intuitive to use.

3. ASP customer support is underwhelming

While some ASP software developers may have perfected the upgrade and support process, the fact remains that an ASP is still an application designed to be installed in your practice rather than on the internet. As a result, the application requires individual attention to upgrades, one instance at a time. That's a considerable expense in time for the software developer, and somebody has to absorb those costs (and that will probably be the end-user).

4. ASP data security is pricey

Nearly every dentist moving away from server-based software asks the same question: "Is my data secure?" An argument can be made that your data on the cloud is more secure than your data on a server under your desk—but that's a different topic. When it comes to ASP, the answer is not as clear, because it varies by vendor.

A true cloud application has the advantage here, too. Data security is achieved by heavily investing in encryption, network security, scalability, and experienced professionals. True cloud developers benefit from economies of scale; the cost of security is spread across all customers. An ASP model requires individual configuration and protection for each customer, which is expensive. The temptation to cut costs may be too much for some ASP software developers. This can leave the practice vulnerable to cyberattacks.

Why a True Cloud is Better than an ASP (continued)

5. ASP service levels are shaky

If your software is delivered via the internet, you should be concerned with two metrics: RTO (Recovery Time Objective) and RPO (Recovery Point Objective).

RTO measures how much time it takes until recovering from service interruption, and RPO measures how much data you will lose when the system unexpectedly shuts down.

From the dentist's perspective, RTO and RPO equate to timeliness and uptime. In the event of an unplanned outage, who can restore service faster with the least amount of disruption and loss of data? A true cloud system is superior because it offers multiple contingencies that can be engaged that avoid or limit downtime and loss of data. In other words, a true cloud environment consists of multiple servers in multiple geographical locations, each ready to take over the instant hardware or connectivity is lost. An ASP, on the other hand, typically does not have the same degree of redundancy, making downtime and data loss more likely.

6. There's no such thing as being partly cloud-based

True cloud-based systems dominate every industry, including the medical world. Dentists lag behind for many different reasons, awareness, and education being chief among them.

Don't be fooled by claims of an application being "partly" cloud-based. There's no such thing. And there isn't a way for an existing management system to be moved to the cloud. The only way an existing application can be moved to the cloud is for it to be rebuilt from the ground up using new technologies.

7. ASP performance is questionable

ASP solutions were built to be installed locally. When these applications are zip-tied to the internet, speed, and response time degrades. Performance is most noticeable when all of your team members are trying to access the application at the same time, or if you're trying to access the application on a mobile device or tablet.



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Five Ways to Know if the Software is an ASP

1. The same software is also offered as an installed version.
2. The software manufacturer finds this whitepaper offensive.
3. You access the software through a “web layer,” Terminal Server, or Citrix.
4. The developer supports multiple versions of the software (like version 3.0, 5.0, and 5.5).
5. The software is delivered via a private or hybrid cloud.

Three Ways to Know if a Product is a True Cloud-based Application

1. Your contract includes a performance level agreement or guarantees an uptime percentage.
2. The software integrates directly with other web-based applications using an API. If the software can be used on a mobile device, then you know it's a true cloud-based application.
3. The software looks and acts like a webpage.

About Curve Dental

Founded in 2004, Curve Dental provides cloud-based dental software and related services to dental practices within the United States and Canada. The company is privately held, with offices in Provo, Utah, and Calgary, Alberta. The company strives to make dental software less about computers and more about user experience. Their creative thinking can be seen in the design of their software, that's easy to use and built only for the web.



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