Moving to the Cloud?

A Buyer's Guide to Finding the Right Strategic IT Partner

It is very tempting as a budget-friendly option to simply click a few keystrokes and instantly stand your systems up in a public cloud-based environment; however, are you potentially gambling with your most mission critical systems? ERP cloud environments should not only be flexible, scalable, and affordable, but also secure and expertly managed.

As an IT leader, putting your enterprise applications into a public cloud model can be a risky proposition: with today's cyber security threats, outages potentially costing companies millions of dollars in revenue, and the complexity of ERP systems that need to be expertly managed. Public, self-provisioning cloud solutions built on white box hardware concept should not make your short list.

However, the adoption of a cloud hosting model is a progressive outsourcing strategy many industry leading organizations are choosing to leverage as a way to save on hardware costs, optimally manage their complex enterprise applications, and get better performance – all helping to drive their business's bottom line.

Where do you get started? There are many key considerations to take into account when migrating a cloud based solution for your ERP environment. This buyer's guide will illuminate your path to the cloud by answering the most common buyer questions:

– Clearly defining a cloud solution

– Questions to Consider when Moving to the Cloud

– Putting the Cloud to Practical Use for Your Business

– Outlining vendor options

– Key Considerations to Choosing a Cloud Provider

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The cloud is not a one size fits all solution...

What does the "cloud" really mean? Does it matter whether my information is in a public or private cloud environment? Should my systems be in a shared environment? How do I know what kind of environment my system will be on? What will my up time be in the cloud?

There are so many questions, so how do you get the answers? A first step would be to understand that not all cloud solutions are "one size fits all," and you should know the difference of how to identify and categorize the definition of the "cloud" as it pertains to your business needs. **The cloud can be defined into four categories.**

Public Cloud

The use of someone else's infrastructure on a subscription-based arrangement. You pay for the resources as you consume them. Commonly used for email or web servers.

Private Cloud

A subset of public cloud that reserves resources specifically for your business. In a private cloud environment, you share infrastructure, but not the core pieces that are specifically allocated for your business. Most common uses are for business applications.

Commonly, both public and private cloud are self-managed.

The following two cloud options are used for enterprise applications, where there is a need for a secure environment and one that is being expertly managed on enterprise class hardware. Enterprise Class hardware is complex and needs to be managed by certified experts, as these are mission-critical systems that cannot afford to suffer from outages or security breaches.

Managed Private Cloud

With managed private cloud, a company no longer needs technical talent. A team of certified experts manages the private cloud environments so that all the maintenance, all the up time, all the patching, everything necessary to keep the environment healthy, is done for you. A company simply needs a contact person, a delegated company representative, to give direction. The most common use is for running your more mission critical core business applications that require certified expertise to manage, with no system outages.

Hybrid Private Cloud

Hybrid cloud can be a mixture of Intel and Power Systems: two different types of framework that are linked together. Hybrid can also refer to combining a hosting representation with a cloud solution. There's many ways to define hybrid cloud – and there's a lot more going on behind the scenes to consider!

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What Self-Provisioning Means for Your Business

With self-provisioning tools, you're not really getting out of the IT business. You still need expert and certified cloud consultants who know how systems work and know how to maintain your enterprise applications. The expert self-management of an enterprise application is more complex than the self-provisioning a web server. Many are under the assumption that self-provisioning allows for instant flexibility, however, when dealing with your most mission critical systems such as ERP, instant flexibility needs to be expertly managed. When you're dealing with ERP systems, your employees will need to consider resource allocation to optimally run your environment. For example, each time a new resource allocation is made to a SAP system, the system requires a restart. Shutting down and restarting your SAP in the middle of a work day for instance can be detrimental to business production, when not being managed by an expert team that can plan this outage on off business hours with no interruption to your business, or better yet complete with minimal downtime.

While self-provisioning may be a helpful option to spin up a development environment or hosting a web server, it can become increasing complex when managing an ERP environment.

Why are so many businesses moving to the cloud?

Businesses are moving to the cloud for a number of reasons. You've probably thought of a number of these reasons yourself as you've considered your own company's move to the cloud. The most common reasons include:

1. "I do not have certified personnel to expertly manage my complex IT environment."
    The expertise has moved on – IT personnel are no longer working for singular companies. They are now working for hosting providers, application development firms and consulting firms, making it that much harder for companies to hire and retain quality IT experts.

2. "I don't want to buy new hardware every couple of years."
    Hardware runs out of useful productivity. Every couple of years, companies have to 1) consider updating their own systems and 2) find the right people to manage and support them. Moving to the cloud allows companies to rely on someone else – a hosting provider – to ensure the continuous health and productivity of the hardware.

3. "I can put the on-site data center real-estate to better use and revenue generation."
    Without a data center on premise, companies can reallocate resources for the now available space and make what was previously a cost-center into a profit-center that motivates and pushes the business forward. Besides profit opportunities, companies can save money by eliminating third party maintenance contracts needed to properly maintain the space, and the need for complex networking connections that are in place to optimally support the systems. In addition, even electricity may no longer be needed, saving you monthly on heating and cooling bills! Even if companies do nothing else besides shut the door on the retired on-site data center and turn out the lights, they're still saving money.

4. "IT is becoming a restrictor to advancing our business."
   When a business wants to change direction, for example, adding a new product line, the technology aspect of the project sits and idles…and idles. Technology updates and requests come often, but since they require business offline time, and additional funding often times IT projects don't get produced at the pace of the business. Growing your business is forefront, and by levering a cloud solution, companies have the ability to optimize their enterprise applications, and not be hindered by them.

Putting the Cloud into Practical Terms for Your Business

All of your enterprise and third party application can be hosted in a cloud environment. However, the type of cloud (public, private, hybrid) that supports each application is different. ERP systems need enterprise class security in a dedicated private cloud model, whereas third party applications can be in a secure public or private cloud platform and perform with ease.

Most of the cloud is based on Intel product line. Gartner states that "the cloud's effect on infrastructure is as follows: Proprietary Unix; dying, other proprietary OS's; dying."

On the other hand, Linux and Windows run on Intel platforms from multiple different manufacturers. What does this mean for you? You can use almost any hardware you want! You can put an operating system on the cloud that people are comfortable with and familiar with, and that's what they can use.

What are the primary cloud provider options available for my company?

Wondering where to start? How should you start looking at the market?

There's many, *many* providers out there. Need proof? Here's a quick list for starters:

- CloudSigma
- EngineYard
- Microsoft Azure
- WorkXpress
- Lunacloud
- Amazon Web Services
- Rackspace
- Dimension Data
- Qt Cloud Services
- iWeb Cloud
- FireHost Inc.

- Skyvia
- TheCompuLab
- VPS.NET
- BlueiTech
- DigitalOcean
- Progress Rollbase
- Google Compute Engine
- Tsuru
- DataPipe

Remember not all cloud vendors are made equal. Just as your ultimate cloud solution should be tailored to fit to your needs, so should your cloud providers with their managed services offering.

There's only one way to sift through all the providers to find the right one, and that is to think about what applications you need supported. Your applications will define what cloud solution is right for your business, and which vendor is ultimately able to support that cloud option. As a business determine what application you want to put in the cloud and, more importantly, what cloud partner's strategy you'll leverage to get you there.

Evaluate: What is the most important application in your company? Consider mission-critical applications at your company, and then follow that application's best practice.

SAP ERP – Perform a Homogenous System Copy

If you're using Salesforce.com, that application is designed specifically to work in the cloud and is available in the public cloud.

However, SAP is designed to be single tenant, single data base, single system (server). It's going to take a lot more work to get your ERP into the cloud, and you're going to need a provider who can help you sift through the work. A managed private cloud service provider like Symmetry will help coach and guide you and will advise specific options for you and expertly manage the cloud solution for you.
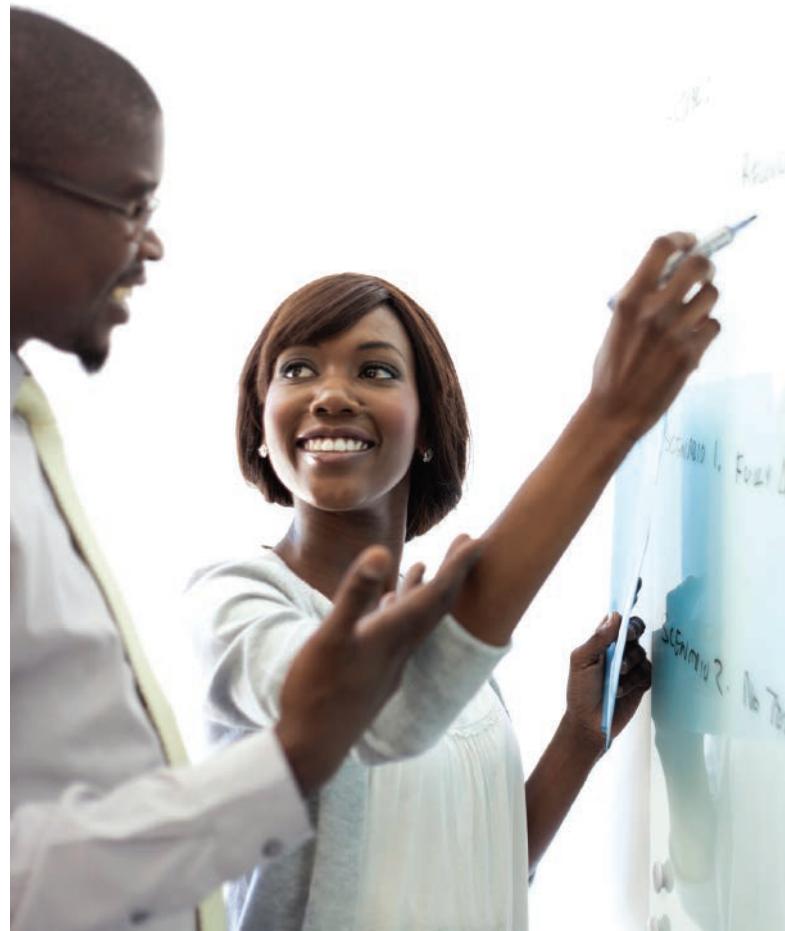
What are the key considerations to selecting the right vendor or partner?

Really, it comes down to one key consideration: what kind of services do you need from your cloud provider?

When you're working with a Managed Private Cloud provider, you should be working with a distinct, defined team. You'll specifically interact with the same people every time, time after time. They'll have suggestions and advice for you. Choosing a cloud provider that is not only certified to host your enterprise applications, but also has the experience and "hands-on" knowledge to provide daily monitoring, management, and integration of your core business systems is key.

When you're working with other, more generic providers, you're on your own. Many commodity based cloud providers lack basic customer service, with long help desk waits to speak with a person who most likely are not certified or qualified to handle your questions directly. You're doing your own shopping. You're doing the work. And, though the infrastructure may be scalable, the security and ongoing complex management of your systems is lacking in the overall steady-state support offered by commodity based vendors when compared to managed private cloud providers.

Though a fully hosted solution can be more costly, the peace of mind knowing your systems are available in a secure environment managed by certified expert engineers is priceless. It boils down to this: Service costs money. But, then again…So do outages. Are you willing to risk it?

What should you watch out for when selecting the right partner?

As outlined, there's a lot of companies out there offering cloud services. Some of these companies will use the current buzz words in attracting companies like yours, "proving" their offering as the best option, even if it hosts on subpar hardware lacking performance, security, and overall expert managed services.

How can you tell which providers really, truly have the know-how, and certified expertise to provide your company with the service you need? Ask the hard questions.

–   May I see certification documentation?

–   May I see an operations manual?

–   What are the names of the consultants on my managed cloud services team?

–   May I see a sample migration project plan?

### Ensure as little downtime as possible – System Outages Will Cost Your Business More than Just a Headache

According to CIO Insight, "On average, system-down occurrences cost a company $5,600 per minute." What you may feel is a cost savings in the near term with a generic cloud service provider can have detrimental business implications if the cloud should be down or worse even experience a security breach.

SLA (service level agreement) is more than an uptime and a rate. It's a service level guarantee for an organization. The reliability of an infrastructure are hugely intertwined with the management, maintenance and tenability of the application itself.

Service level is about more than just uptime. If your environment is not looked after, you're susceptible to vulnerabilities to your system and to your platform's security.

Security is one thing, but it also goes hand-in-hand with others. Full system configurations and integrations know-how refers to the knowledge of each component that makes up the application platform for your company. A wrong move could result in the corruption of your entire system – and that will cost both time and money.

This diagram outlines the layers of complexity that need to be secure and expertly managed:

"Smart Hand's" Working together to manage each layer

- ERP
- Database
- OS
- Hardware
- Network
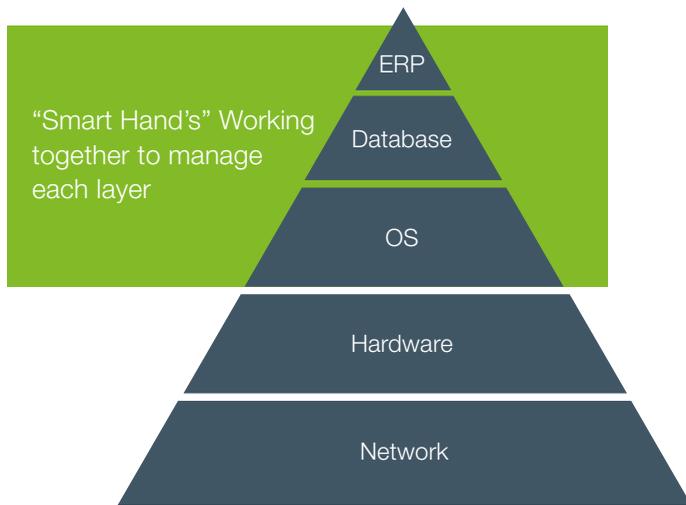
If your business is dependent upon your customers using the Internet to enter orders and make requests to purchase, you rely on the availability of your environment for the opportunity to generate revenue. Nothing is more important.

Your Cloud Strategy

After reading this expert buyer's guide, you should be more prepared and feel empowered to take on the challenge of finding the right cloud solution and provider for your business.

For more information regarding Symmetry's Enterprise Cloud services and managed hosting capabilities visit **www.SymmetryCorp.com/it-solutions/enterprise-cloud/**

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- Simplify and standardize
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