

Some Cloud Computing Tips for you



Richard Walsh, managing director of It-atWork de-mystifies cloud computing, and explains the benefits

Cloud computing is a term that we have all been hearing lots about over the last few years. You may already be making good use of its facilities. Or, you may be wondering what it means and whether it could be of interest for you. So, you could be surprised to learn that if you access or are active on YouTube, Gmail, Google Apps, Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, you are already a cloud user.

To sum it up, Wikipedia defines cloud computing as the use of computing resources (hardware and software) delivered as a service over a network, usually the internet.

Cloud computing has a number of benefits, including its facility for on-line data backup. Its solutions that 'know' which files you have created or changed and back them up continuously and automatically can be especially helpful.

Cloud-based e-mail systems have advantages too, but I would sound a note of caution. There have been instances of systems losing a high volume of emails, which can obviously have a devastating effect on businesses. You can avoid this, though, by choosing a cloud email service, such as Zimbra, which can keep multiple physical copies of your mail in a variety of locations.

It is also worth trying out free or low cost cloud applications such as Google Docs – these allow you to create solutions, which although basic, can still provide improvements to your business processes.

Often, it is only when you get the opportunity to try out software for yourself that its strengths and weaknesses become apparent. So, if you are interested in a cloud-based customer relationship management tool, you might like to consider [Salesforce.com](https://www.salesforce.com), which offers free trials of its software services for 30 days. There are other applications providing free trials too.

To sum up, cloud computing can enhance your business systems and processes, enabling them to run more smoothly and effectively, so it is well worth finding out more.

Some good sources of further information include the CloudPro iPhone application (free), the Chartered Institute for IT book Cloud Computing on Kindle (£1.71) and The Ultimate Guide to Cloud Computing magazine, 2nd edition, which costs around £8. You can also call on the advice of a good IT consultant, who can tailor cloud-based solutions to your individual requirements.

It-atWork, based in Edinburgh and Angus, provides IT support and consultancy to businesses and other PC users throughout the east of Scotland. Further information is available at www.it-atwork.co.uk and on Twitter @itatwork1.