

## Lonely as a Cloud?

*I wandered lonely as a cloud,  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of golden daffodils.*

So penned William Wordsworth, one of our most famous poets, after a pleasant spring walk around Ullswater in the Lake District. However, written as it was in 1804, Wordsworth would have had no idea that in the 21st Century 'Cloud' would come to have a completely different parallel meaning. I talk of course about the 'delivery of computing as a service rather than a product whereby shared resources, software, and information are provided to computers and other devices as a metered service over a network typically the internet' (Wikipedia)

Like most new technologies, 'Cloud' has been through its hype period, where much is written about a subject, but there is little practical application of the technology. Moreover, what is written in that hype period creates unrealistic expectations which results later in disillusionment as the technology fails to deliver those expectations.

Fortunately 'Cloud' is now through that period to a position where the expectations and reality have come into line. In the reality period we can see that 'Cloud' does not provide the solution for every IT project, but it can be enormously beneficial in many situations. Initially cloud computing was just like Wordsworth's cloud, in that it was quite lonely as there was little practical uptake.

However, that is no longer the case, and our computing 'Cloud' is now not at all lonely, there is an accelerating uptake. In order to determine where 'Cloud' can bring significant benefits we need to separate the myths that abounded in the hype period from the facts.

Here are the main benefits often associated with 'Cloud' computing:

- Reduced cost
- Only pay for what you use
- Reduced Infrastructure
- Time to implement
- Scalability
- Available anywhere

It is generally a myth that cloud computing solutions will be lower cost, if we are taking a long-term view. Many of our customers with on-premise solutions have been running them for 15 years, and in that scenario on-premise is almost certainly going to be a lower cost. What will be cheaper are the initial costs, as there will be no upfront capital expenditure, so for a new, start up or rapidly growing business, where short term costs are more important than long terms costs Cloud will be very attractive. That you only pay for what you use will undoubtedly be true. The ability to vary the computing power to be applied to any application at short notice is one of the significant benefits that Cloud computing offers. Data storage can be easily expanded, as can processing power. For businesses that are growing fast, or have significant seasonal variations the concept of paying for your computing power as you use it can be very attractive.

Whether there will be a significant reduction in the infrastructure requirements will depend much on the application. Advanced warehouse management systems require on

site wireless networks and wireless terminals, so the relative savings in that situation would be less than with some other applications such as CRM systems, which do not require any on-site infrastructure.

Similarly the reduction in implementation timescales will depend upon the application. For simple applications addressing straightforward business functions that require little set up and training, then a Cloud solution would enable fast implementation.

For applications covering more complex business applications such as warehouse management using wireless terminals the exercise of mapping the business processes and staff training will be the same, so the overall benefit from the Cloud will be smaller.

If the business application is likely to be required extensively when personnel are off site, then it would be well suited to a cloud solution. For other business applications when the majority of access is required on site, then the relative benefits are smaller. One myth is that Cloud computing is less secure.

Infrastructure providers have highly resilient and secure data centres that prevent unauthorised access, almost certainly using processes and technology that are significantly more rigorous than most businesses would have in house. Regrettably the biggest security threat for many companies is their own staff.

Hence for most businesses security should not be a major consideration in deciding which option is best.

One other myth is that an application has to be specially written for Cloud computing to be effective. Whilst it is true that some legacy applications particularly those with a 'thick client' architecture, may not deploy well in a 'Cloud' environment; a well-structured application using modern thin client technology can be deployed either as a cloud solution or as an on premise solution.

The conclusion therefore is that Cloud computing is not the panacea for all ills. However, there are situations where it can offer significant benefits. The relative benefits are likely to be greater for applications addressing simple business processes, where the company is new or fast growing, or has significant seasonal variations in volumes, and where the application needs to be frequently accessed remotely. It is a question of assessing the needs of each individual situation and deciding the best solution, be it cloud or on premise. At Proteus Software we are able to offer both options and can give our impartial advice on which we think best meets your needs.

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