



Getting your IT Infrastructure Right in a Cloud World – Five Options to Consider

We define Information Technology Infrastructure as the server and networking components that provide the execution platform for application software. Historically, options for the infrastructure platform were typically limited as the standard configuration included file, application, and database servers owned by you, located on-premise, and managed by your IT staff.

However, in the last few years the landscape has changed dramatically. The advent of server virtualization and Storage Area Networks (SAN's) and other technology has increased the complexity (and skills required) to manage this equipment significantly.

Additionally, the improvement of Managed Services offerings and the advent of cloud technology have brought a number of additional options for infrastructure deployments. These options range from complete application outsourcing to traditional on-premise management with a few steps in between.

While the larger number of options is welcome, selecting the right one for your business can be a bit intimidating. We've identified the Five Key Models you may want to consider:

1. Cloud Only Applications

Some of the application products released within the last few years are strictly cloud based and don't offer an on-premise model. They are typically priced based the number of individuals in your organization accessing the product in any given month.

These products are hosted by the vendor themselves and are optimized to be delivered via the Internet. Popular products in this category would include Sales Force for CRM, Box.Com for Enterprise Content Management, gMail for E-Mail, and NetSuite for integrated financials.

A primary advantage of this model is quick installation as it may take only a few hours to have a complex application available for your organization. Support is also straightforward as you're dealing with a single provider for all components of application delivery. One disadvantage is a lack of flexibility for specialized implementations.

2. Cloud Optional Applications



Some products have been adapted by the vendor for delivery in a cloud model with the option for installation in your on-premise data center as well.

Advantages of this model include the ability to rapidly begin using the application via cloud delivery but with an option to later move the installation on-premise if desired.

A disadvantage is that some products aren't necessarily built to work in a cloud model often resulting in a higher delivery cost from the vendor compared to "Cloud Only" applications.

3. Cloud Infrastructure that you manage

This is a hybrid model where you buy processing capacity on cloud servers. You then load and manage your applications on these servers much as you would if the servers were located in your data center.

This works well for those who prefer to not own or maintain their own physical hardware but are using software products that aren't yet available via cloud providers.

Advantages include removing the burden of managing hardware locally, reduced risk of unavailability due to power and network outages, and the ability to "scale up" and "scale down" in hardware without capital expense.

A disadvantage is the need to continue having your own technology resources available to manage components of the server implementation.



4. On Premise Infrastructure via Managed Services

Some firms aren't comfortable moving their computing resources offsite but don't have the requisite technology specialists on their staff needed to manage their infrastructure. Local providers are available in most metropolitan areas that specialize in outsourced server management. These "Managed Services" providers will help determine your equipment needs, load the equipment in your data center, provide maintenance and also manage the backup process for you.

Capital expenses are typically required as you'll still own the hardware. The quality of the Managed Services vendors can vary substantially so picking a competent vendor is a key success factor.

5. On Premise Infrastructure managed by your IT staff

Some companies will find that the traditional model of on-premise infrastructure managed by their own staff is still the best fit.

This is particularly true if your environment is complex or has special requirements not easily addressed with generic cloud or Managed Services offerings.

While offering the highest level of flexibility, this model often requires funding a technology staff of at least two or three individuals to cover the full range of infrastructure technologies required by most businesses.

Conclusion

It is rare that cost savings alone can justify a move to a new model if your current infrastructure and support practices are meeting your needs. Re-evaluation of your infrastructure model is usually driven by the need to adopt new applications or when equipment in the existing environment has aged to the point it's no longer reliable.

Any of these models will likely serve your business well with appropriate planning and diligent execution. However, the best choice will be dependent on the applications used in your business, your internal technology competency, and also your personal preference for maintaining complete control over your computing assets versus placing that responsibility with someone outside of your organization.



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About OnCourse Technology Group - Headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama, we provide consulting services for businesses seeking to improve operations and profitability through the application of Information Technology. Our goal is to become the trusted advisor to our clients in all matters relating to the usage of technology products. Our services include strategic planning, software selection, and implementation project management for a wide range of businesses.

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