



Is your best IT solution in the cloud?

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As an employee within the IT industry it would be churlish of me to knock the ongoing advances made through technology, the opportunities these provide for product improvement by the service providers and the potential benefits these can deliver to its users. I do, however, have a concern that the associated new buzz-words, acronyms and marketing-hype that go hand-in-hand with this advancement sometimes provide a distraction from the fundamentals of good decision-making in the selection of an appropriate IT solution.

“Cloud computing” is one of the latest concepts doing the rounds in the selling of IT services, with a number of diverse IT business service providers climbing onto the cloud for promotional purposes, perhaps in the hope that the heavenly association will add to their basic product. Cloud-based computing is enabled through the burgeoning of the internet and describes the concept of storing and accessing data, and possibly the application responsible for processing this data, on a computer located in the internet cloud – but because a service is “cloud-based” does not imply that the solution is optimum for the user. While there certainly is merit to much of what cloud computing can offer, two issues need to be considered:

- Firstly, is the business application on which the data will be processed the best available to your business, irrespective of its location in the cloud or elsewhere?
- Secondly, does your business in fact want its data stored within the cloud?

The following basic steps should assist anyone considering the appropriateness of a decision in the IT arena and therefore provide an answer to the conundrum posed by the two questions above:

- **Identify the requirements of an IT solution which will best serve your business needs**
Functionality, cost, ease of use, accommodation of future requirements, support availability, suitability to local environment, etc are some of the generic issues which should be identified in this step. Within the context of this article a specific consideration would be whether “cloud computing” is in fact one of your business requirements. The adage “If you do not know where you are going any road will get you there” is a useful

reminder of the importance of this as a prerequisite to a comprehensive evaluation process.

- **Understand what alternative options are available to meet these requirements**

The information technology sector is generally a competitive environment and there will usually be alternative means of meeting your IT requirements. History is not necessarily the best indicator of your future needs and to simply assume that because your existing system has worked satisfactorily in the past it will provide you with the best solution in the future is naïve, at the very least, and thus the exercise should actively ensure that alternatives are identified for evaluation.

- **Objectively evaluate each of the options against your requirements**

Every solution will differ from the other in some respects and you should seek to evaluate whether these differences provide benefits or disadvantages to your business. Obviously the same rating scale should be applied in the evaluation of each of the alternative solutions, determining how each compares to the other in delivering the same business requirements, in order to provide an objective distinction between each of the options.

- **Compare the overall results of your evaluation of each of the alternate solution options**

This step is necessary to draw a conclusion on which is the best IT solution for your business, and should be a logical result based on the preceding three steps. Clearly “cost-effectiveness” should be the primary factor in drawing a conclusion.

It is vital that individuals with appropriate knowledge – to understand and objectively evaluate the requirements, and power – to implement any decision flowing from the exercise, participate in the evaluation. If either of these elements are absent the conclusion will be unreliable and the implementation impossible.

Before you get carried away, with your head floating in the clouds, make sure your feet are on the ground by going back to the basics of a sustainable IT decision. ♦