WHAT IS THE CLOUD?

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CLOUD

25 years ago, X Factor didn't exist and this thing called "the internet" was just getting started. A few years before that, Tim Berners-Lee invented new shiny technology called the World Wide Web. He claimed it would change the world. At the time most of us didn't understand what it meant or how it would affect our lives.

It's now hard to imagine a life without the internet. It connects us to people all over the world and gives us access to all kinds of information. It's become such an intrinsic part of everyday life that it can send whole organisations into a panic if the connection is slow.

The Internet - once shrouded in mystery is now something we all take for granted, and it's practically unheard of to find someone who hasn't used it at least once.

As the world evolves and technology is updating, there's always something new to get us scratching our heads and feeling out of our comfort zones. Today, the new (ish) and somewhat intimidating kid on the block is the cloud.

It seems to have become one of those buzzwords that techy types use to assert their status as computer gurus, while everyone else is wondering what on earth they're talking about. "Your data is stored in the cloud," they'll say.

If you're one of the many who finds the concept of cloud computing a little difficult to get your head around, you're not alone. And we thought we'd put together a guide for you, which will explain all those cloud related things you are wondering about.

SO WHAT IS THE CLOUD?

When we say your data is stored in the cloud, we don't mean it's floating about. The cloud is lots of servers that are connected via the internet. The term refers to a collection of services and softwares that can be accessed by the internet, instead of taking up space on your computer.

The information is held on remote servers and server farms - a fancy way of saying data centres - so you don't even need a powerful computer to be able to access it. Cloud computing simply means - computing that takes place online.

It's about taking files or services and moving them outside the confines of internal hard drives. All services are accessed and worked on over the internet. Cloud networks are a combination of different groups of servers and service providers who take care of data processing, storage and software updates.

The great thing about the cloud is that you don't have to be tied down to using just one device to access your important files. Before the cloud it meant leaving the office at 5pm and not having access to your data until the next morning. With the cloud you can work via your mobile phone (and lots of other devices) from anywhere in the world with an internet connection.

The cloud is fantastic for productivity and flexible working. It allows numerous people to work together on the same document, improving collaboration and team building. It also encourages remote working and working from home if necessary.

Without realising it you may have already used a cloud service. Such as Spotify, Google documents, social media and even online banking. All of which you can use on mobile and desktop devices.

More businesses are integrating cloud computing. It may be a single application or multiple elements. Cloud computing has its benefits; it provides a predictable cost model, is easy to scale, makes remote working a lot easier and provides increased resiliency.

THE CLOUD EXPLAINED IN A NON-TECHY NON-JARGONY WAY

WHY USE THE CLOUD?

Many businesses decide to move to the cloud for financial reasons. This is because everything is stored remotely and there are huge savings to be made in terms of hardware and equipment, which often becomes outdated quickly.

It makes cloud solutions highly scalable, allowing your business to grow organically without having to spend money on tech. You can also outsource your work or IT needs to specialist teams who can manage your systems, deal with any issues and monitor your network remotely.

So how do you make good use of the cloud? Alongside cloud services you will need a great internet connection. We highly recommend you also have suitable firewalls, anti-virus software and that your staff are fully trained in internet safety.

The cloud is a fantastic way to store data that's not sensitive (music, videos, photos, films etc) and a lot of the big players are working tirelessly to keep even the super confidential stuff safe too. Google encrypts all messages now, as does WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and numerous others. And with a hotshot IT support company, like us, on your side monitoring your network 24/7 and keeping your files on lockdown the worry will be significantly reduced.

Many organisations ulitise cloud services such as backup, storage and DR (disaster recovery). We can help bridge the gap so both your on premise and cloud solutions work in harmony.

THE CLOUD EXPLAINED IN A NON-TECHY, NON-JARGONY WAY

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Although you'd be forgiven for thinking that the cloud was the brainchild of a millennial, its history actually dates back way further than that - as far back as the 1950s.

Back in those days computers were so huge that you needed a whole room to house just one, and so expensive that they were limited to only the wealthiest of large organisations. The idea of multiple users all having their own computer was unheard of because there simply wasn't enough room or money, companies developed rotas which enabled people to share one computer.

Almost 20 years later, inventor JCR Licklider created the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, also known as ARPANET, with the dream that we'd all be able to work on files from anywhere in the world.

These ideas didn't come to fruition until the late 90s, when Salesforce launched one of the first ever applications that could be accessed entirely online. Despite Salesforce's success, it's still taken all this time for cloud computing to become anything close to the norm. But now we're getting there.

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