

benefits of being in the *cloud*

By Terry Brock

The days of relying on hard drives to keep your data safe are over; this smart option not only protects you from hardware malfunction, but it allows you to access your info from anywhere.

“Permanent fortifications are monuments to man’s stupidity.”

- General George S. Patton,
United States Army.

As a mobile professional, salesperson, entrepreneur or over-achiever, you have to be able to move quickly today. General Patton would have considered it silly to depend on a big computer fortress for your data. That means having the right kind of technology established to support you and help you serve clients. A big trend now is having your software loaded “in the cloud” vs. on the desktop or even a laptop.

Eric Schmidt, the CEO of Google, was credited for coming up with the concept of doing business “in the cloud” a few years ago. It is catching on fast, and it means solid business opportunities for you out in the field and in your office.

The Old Way

Way back in the 20th Century (remember that?), you would buy software, load it on your computer, fiddle with it to make it work, protect it from viruses, pay big dollars for the new upgrade and then cry when your hard drive crashed and you lost it all. Raise your hand if you can relate.

That was how we computed before, and it created an endless stream of aggravation for people just trying to do business.

The Way Today

Today we do it differently. By being in the cloud, you have the bulk of your contact management, word processing, spreadsheets and most anything else you

need on a server that is accessed over the Internet. As long as you have access to the Internet, you do business there and can regularly get the most updated software. When a new upgrade is released, you don’t have to load it yourself. It is done by the geniuses at the company that provides your service. This is why it is also called “software as a service,” or SaaS for short.

Today we access that data through a variety of Net-accessible devices. This could be a SmartPhone, your iPad, your Netbook computer, your laptop or even that desktop back at the office (yes, we can still use those).

I am using several tools now to keep all my contacts on a website, and then use Google Docs for word processing, spreadsheets and a lot more. By keeping my data in the cloud, I know it is constantly backed up. I also know I can access it with a variety of computers, including at an Internet café if I’m on the road and can’t use my own computer. Now I can focus on generating sales and helping clients, and let the wonderful IT people take care of the details.





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Security & Backup

Around this time many start wondering about two important concepts. The first, “How do we keep our data secure?” Quickly followed by “What about backup?” For security, make sure you have good password protection on your data access. Also, make sure you are dealing with a company that has a rock-solid reputation for security. If possible, even password-protect the documents that you put online so they are double protected.

Further protection means making sure you don’t put any sensitive documents online where there is little security. For instance, Google Docs is good for storage, but the security part of it is very shallow and doesn’t offer password protection for individual documents. It is not recommended for sensitive documents. Keep those elsewhere on your computer system or on a specialized website that uses Department of Defense level security.

Regarding backup, you will want to have a copy of your database stored on your laptop or portable device. I have my main contact management in the cloud and have it regularly sent to my iPad and my laptop. That way I’m able to access what I need, even if I can’t get to the Net. The database in the cloud serves as a regular backup if I ever have a computer crash or theft.

Bottom Line

The bottom line is that cloud computing is changing the way we operate and store information. Instead of looking for the next cool software program, look for a good company with rock-solid support, security and service in the cloud.

I think General George Patton would be smiling at us as we become more flexible, adaptable and less reliant on the “permanent fortification” of software loaded on our computers. ☺



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