

Today's IT Forecast: Abundant Cloud Computing

Meteorologists possess the uncanny ability to be *almost* right *almost* all of the time. Now that doesn't always help when you're planning the company picnic, but reports of a 70% chance of precipitation does, at the very least, encourage the party planner to rent a tent. What weather men and women are unable to do, however, is predict weather trends for the years ahead. (Global warming controversy notwithstanding. . .)

That's where IT forecasters have a huge advantage over meteorologists. . . Their predictions are based upon hard numbers: sales, polls, and product development. Their odds for naming the trends accurately? Exponentially better. And the forecast for the year is in:

Today's IT forecast calls for abundant and blanketing cloud computing.

Huh? Cloud computing? What's that, you ask? Let's break it down. Have you ever seen the Internet depicted in cartoonish computer network diagrams? Invariably, it is housed in and represented by a cloud. Think of that cloud as a metaphor; clouds are intangible, shape-shifting bunches of nothingness that actually house potential energy (manifested as rain, hail, sleet, or snow). The Internet is also something insubstantial that possesses immeasurable data and power. Both clouds and the Internet conceal their complicated and awesome infrastructures; get it?

OK; so what, then, is *cloud computing*? Simply, it is using computer technology within the cloud. Gone are the days when users were forced to own the servers on which their information technology was stored. Companies are now able to utilize computer resources as a service; they do not own the infrastructure, but rent usage. They tap into various business applications online, paying a monthly or yearly fee to use the software they need. It's similar to paying the power company to heat your house, instead of chopping your own wood. It's like a leasing a car instead of purchasing it.

Now many companies, especially those with vast and trained IT departments still choose to purchase their software. A knowledgeable IT department, one with expertise about and control over company-owned software is still an asset to any larger company, but cloud computing is gaining momentum around the world. (See IT forecast above.)

One of the fastest growing segments of the cloud computing industry is a model of software deployment known as SaaS (commonly pronounced *sass* in IT circles). We know—the acronym makes us smile, too. Software as a Service can provide a more cost-effective method to meet business objectives than the traditional company-owned software applications. But the pros and cons of such a decision need to be carefully measured. An expert Microsoft partner will be able to shed light on which would benefit your company.

(Remember the meteorologist? We're just telling you the forecast; you'll have to decide for yourself if you put on those stylish galoshes.)

So what now, you ask? You like to keep your finger on the pulse of industry trends. You listen to prognosticators. You even made sure your HR director rented that tent for the company

picnic. Perhaps, then, it is time to talk with someone you trust about your IT company objectives. Microsoft Dynamics products can all be leased and deployed as SaaS. Sounds *sassy*, doesn't it?

Is cloud computing right for you? Perhaps we should check with that meteorologist after all. . .