Cloud Computing: It's not all smoke and mirrors

Having "your head in the clouds" used to have a negative connotation. Now with cloud computing—the ability to distribute resources and information across multiple servers over the Internet from a remote location ("in the clouds") and back to your local device—makes the term appealing and very cutting edge.

What's all the buzz about?

Big companies like Google, Apple and Amazon already have their heads in the clouds. And, much like snowflakes, no two clouds are alike. Some clouds are public—like Gmail and others, are closed, like corporate networks.

Riding the clouds

Microsoft has made its position on cloud computing clear (no pun intended)—it is squarely focused on cloud-based applications and services for the foreseeable future.

In fact, Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's CEO, kicked off their "All In" message about cloud computing in a talk with Washington State University students in March 2010. Ballmer talked about "the cloud" and the implications for applications and content sharing. He stated that the five principles key to Microsoft's "cloud" strategy is its ability to:

- Create opportunities and responsibilities

- Help you learn and take action

- Enhance personal and professional interactions

- Encourage the need for smarter devices

- Drive server advances that in turn drives the cloud

Over the next few months Microsoft will be showing that it has "skin in" the game with its largest-ever ad campaign chanting the mantra of "cloud power" and its benefits over traditional server-based computing such as lower start-up costs and increased flexibility.

Embracing the latest technologies

Mid-sized companies may be able to reach for the clouds with more ease than many behemoth organizations or smaller competitors. According to Symantec's 2010 State of the Data Center report, mid-sized firms are more nimble and better able to implement new technologies over large enterprises, which often take years to start a new project or

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change direction, and smaller businesses that lack resources (both people skills and budget). For those able to hop a cloud, the benefits can be cost savings due to the elimination of expenses involving servers and other maintenance, software and security as well as better ability to manage the growing complexity of IT.

The pace of adoption is growing dramatically. In fact, a recently published study by Wall Street Equity Research states that cloud-computing revenues may reach almost $70 billion by the end of 2010 and are forecasted to even double over the next four years. Some companies consider the security risk of cloud computing too great and may opt for offsite data storage. However, for other companies the sky is the limit.

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