



## CHAMBER MEMBER NEWS

### **How Small Businesses Can Benefit from Cloud Computing**

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In today's ever-changing business climate, agility is key for small business owners and their employees. It's about having the information and resources they need right when they need it, whether they're on their laptops, tablets, or mobile phones-- in the office, out in the field or on the road.

And that's where cloud computing comes in. Cloud computing is a digital service that allows users to access important programs and data anywhere they have an internet connection.

With its low upfront cost-- and benefits that can include increased efficiency, anywhere access, improved cash flow, and reduced risk during a crisis-- it's hard to imagine why any business would not at least consider making a move to the cloud.

In this quick summary, we'll look at a few of the benefits of cloud computing for a small business, and what you can do to quickly begin taking advantage of all the cloud offers.

#### **Increase Business Flexibility and Team Collaboration**

One of the biggest benefits of pivoting to cloud computing is the increased flexibility it offers your company. No matter what type of business you're in, there's a cloud-based app that can help you get things done more efficiently.

Apps like Shopify, for example, bring inventory management, point-of-sale, order tracking, and e-commerce into a single application. Microsoft 365 is another cloud-based productivity solution that lets employees collaborate on projects, download important files, and work directly on specialized computer programs.

From payroll and accounting apps to marketing and management tools, the cloud can help solve business problems quickly and efficiently by allowing you to add new tools to your toolkit as needs arise.

#### **Scalability That Can Grow with Your Business**

Most small businesses are looking for ways to grow and expand.

But there's a danger in growing too fast too quickly and outpacing your infrastructure. This can lead to a range of issues that can have a negative effect on things like budget and finances, HR and payroll, product delivery, and customer engagement.

These types of problems only become more difficult if you're using some sort of in-house solution. For example, while a "do it yourself" solution for tracking calls can work very well when you're dealing with a limited number of customers, you're going to run into problems if you suddenly need to rapidly scale your customer service.



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The good news is that there are cloud-based solutions in place that can help solve your needs today, as well as keep pace with your growth and help you get things done tomorrow. That's the power of the cloud—you have the flexibility to add capacity as you need it, without having to reinvent the wheel.

### **Increase Resilience and Reduce Risk**

Most small businesses are thinking about managing day-to-day activities, not about what they're going to do if a disaster strikes. This is totally understandable; there's so much to worry about when you're running a small business that planning for anything else beyond keeping the lights on and the doors open feels like an unnecessary distraction.

Nevertheless, you still need to make the time to plan for a crisis.

If you're not prepared for a crisis, you aren't alone. Seventy-five percent of small business owners don't have a plan in place for what they'll do if a disaster strikes.

Fifty-two percent of small business owners say that it would take at least three months to recover from a disaster. Overshadowing all of this is the simple fact that 40 percent of small businesses never reopen after a disaster shuts them down.

Business cloud services enable your team to perform key job functions, no matter where they're working from. Moving your key data and business processes to the cloud provides you with the redundancies you need to make sure that you don't lose key data or functionality when disaster strikes.

In addition, a hosted voice solution allows you to pick up the phone even if your office experiences a service interruption. Cloud storage offsite means you can still get at the information you need even if you can't physically access your own equipment.

As Oklahomans, we know that severe weather alone has become a four-season concern. And that doesn't take into consideration things like fires, data breaches, cyberattacks and other natural disasters. Make sure you have a plan for whatever scenario might occur.

### **Free-Up Resources**

Beyond the worst-case scenario, moving to the cloud can lighten the load whoever manages your company's IT functions. This is especially true if you take advantage of a managed service provider to help with day-to-day tasks like network monitoring and support.

In a small business, it's often a struggle to put out every fire; that puts you in a reactive mode, where you're responding to problems as they arise. The problem with a reactive approach to managing your infrastructure is that it doesn't leave room for innovation. You're not thinking ahead because you're spending so much time figuring out how to deal with what has already happened.



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Shifting into a proactive mindset is imperative if you hope to bring innovation into your business. Taking advantage of cloud-based monitoring and IT solutions helps make that possible by offloading the reactive work, which in turn frees-up your team to focus on growing and advancing your business.

### **Reduce Business Expenses**

For many businesses, the cost saving benefits of cloud computing is critical. Regardless of the size of your business, you can find significant savings through reduced spending on computer equipment, IT resources, software and more. The cost of a business-oriented cloud service is still a monthly expense, but it's a manageable and predictable expense.

In addition, cloud computing can provide a small business with access to tools, programs, and applications they need, but that might otherwise not be affordable.

The low upfront costs of moving to the cloud, combined with these other benefits, make it a worthwhile consideration for almost any small business.

### **Cloud computing: the bottom line**

I feel confident in saying that cloud computing is the future of business. Cloud computing puts "big company" capability and capacity within reach of a smaller business' resources and budgets, and you get access to ultramodern data centers with highly trained experts who will keep you up and running 24-7.

The competitive advantages of cloud computing, including the ease of moving data and applications, makes it an opportunity that's too important to ignore. For the reasons mentioned, and more, it's certainly worth investigating how a cloud solution can help contribute to your company's performance, productivity, and ROI.



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