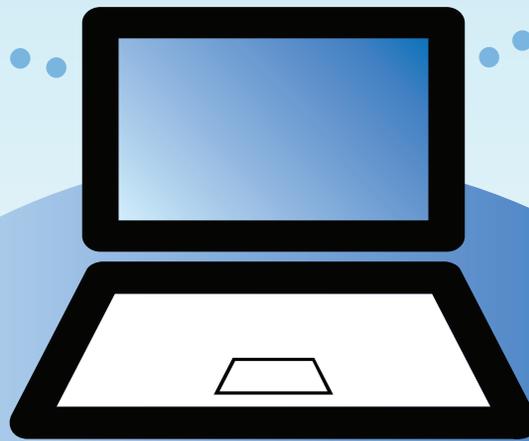


Ten Reasons To Adopt Cloud Computing for Your Law Office

by Jack Newton



Cloud computing has rapidly evolved from a technology used by a small number of cutting-edge law firms to a broadly adopted technology embraced by firms of all sizes.

Cloud computing, or software-as-a-service (SaaS), refers to the notion of computing (software and data) being delivered as a service over the Internet. That is, rather than accessing software and data on desktop computers and servers located “on premises,” you access your software and data via a web browser. With the cloud computing model, your software and data are hosted and maintained by a third-party provider.

While this might sound abstract, you are likely already using cloud computing directly or indirectly: Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo Mail, Facebook, Twitter, and Salesforce.com can all be considered cloud-based technologies.

Here are the top 10 reasons to adopt cloud computing for your law office:

1. Freedom

Cloud computing offers an unparalleled level of freedom to get your work done where and when you choose. Because your software and data are available on any device with an Internet connection, you can access your data from your law office, home, court, or even while on vacation, if the need arises.

2. Easy to Use

One of the biggest benefits of cloud-based solutions is the speed at which they can be learned. Because cloud-based applications run in a web browser, you’re already familiar with the user interface. You click a link to “drill down” into data; you click the “back” button to get back to the previous screen; you print data on the screen by clicking the “print” button. Because

you’re able to take advantage of your existing knowledge of how to use a web browser, most cloud-based applications only take a few minutes or hours to learn.

This stands in stark contrast to traditional desktop-based solutions, which can have complex, non-standard user interfaces that take days, or even weeks, to learn.

3. Up and Running Quickly

The complexity of traditional client/server software means long implementation times. Cloud-based software, however, can typically be implemented in just a few minutes. There’s no hardware to configure or software to install — just sign up and you’re done. Your cloud provider takes care of the rest.

4. Tablet and Smartphone Friendly

With traditional desktop software, your data was often “trapped” on your desktop. Accessing your data from a mobile device, if not impossible, would often involve a cumbersome and error-prone “syncing” process.

Cloud computing, on the other hand, offers “live” access to your cloud computing software and data via a mobile-optimized website or application. You can potentially access gigabytes of cloud-based data on demand without any need for a syncing process and you have the confidence you’re always looking at the most up-to-date version of your data.

As we enter a “post-PC” era dominated by devices such as smartphones and tablet computers, the importance of having access to your data where and when you choose will only continue to rise. Cloud computing and the new generation of mobile devices are the perfect fit for each other.

5. Security

Cloud computing offers a level of security and data protection superior to on-premises solutions. Cloud computing vendors typically store data in highly secure, specialized data centers adhering to SAS 70 Type II auditing standards with 24/7 security monitoring and advanced, biometric-based access procedures. Cloud-based providers also perform routine and intensive server penetration testing, which, when coupled with high levels of physical security, offer an unprecedented level of data protection.

Additionally, most cloud computing providers will offer geographically redundant storage of your data, meaning your data will remain intact and secure even if a data center suffers a catastrophic failure. Security provisions are, however, by no means standard across cloud computing providers; they are “best practices” that you should ensure your prospective cloud computing provider adheres to.

6. No Upfront Costs

Most cloud computing solutions offer a simple month-to-month subscription, meaning there are no upfront licensing costs. Likewise, because the cloud computing provider maintains hardware for you in “the cloud,” you don’t have the upfront hardware purchases associated with traditional desktop software.

7. Lower Total Cost of Ownership

Cloud computing not only costs less upfront, but less over the long term as well. To compare costs between cloud computing and traditional on-premises solutions, use a Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) analysis, where all the direct and indirect costs of each solution is compared over a three-year period. Such analyses from the Gartner Group, Forrester Research, and others show cloud computing solutions can offer a 50 percent to 75 percent cost advantage over traditional desktop-based solutions.

8. No Lock-in

By the time you’ve finished implementing a traditional desktop solution, you’ve likely spent anywhere between \$5,000 and

\$25,000. This “sunk cost” can make it difficult to switch to a different software system down the road. Furthermore, some traditional desktop-based systems make it difficult or impossible to export your data in an open non-proprietary format. Because you haven’t made a large upfront investment in a cloud-based system, you’re free to switch to a system that’s a better fit for your needs. Most cloud-based systems make it easy to export your data in an open, non-proprietary format, thus making it relatively easy to switch from one system to another.

9. Collaboration

Putting your practice in the cloud means that it’s easy to selectively share data with your clients and other relevant parties. Many offerings — whether file storage services such as Dropbox or Box.net or practice management solutions — offer the ability to securely share files with your clients. Cloud-based collaboration is more efficient, more secure, and can be a value-add service that helps you compete.

10. Ease of Migration

If you’re thinking about moving some or all of your data to the cloud, you may be wondering if it’s possible to migrate all of your existing contacts, documents, and other data in an automated fashion. Luckily, it is.

For some cloud-based services, such as Dropbox, migrating is as simple as dragging and dropping your files from your desktop to Dropbox’s cloud. In other cases, such as with practice management data, you may need to enlist the services of a consultant to help migrate data from your previous system. Data migrations take planning and may involve some additional costs, but you’ll be able to avoid the costly and error-prone process of a manual data migration.

Conclusion

Cloud computing offers a compelling alternative to traditional desktop-based software and is seeing rapid adoption thanks to its ability to deliver easier-to-use, easier-to-deploy solutions at a lower total cost. By embracing cloud computing, you can make your law firm more cost-effective, more efficient, and capable of providing improved service and security to your clients. ☺



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