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Cloud Computing

Offers Nonprofits Greater Flexibility at a Lower Cost

By Bill Abram

Dip Your Toe in the Water

1. Email

Replace your outdated email server with a cloud-based solution for business and reduce your capital expenses while providing first-class spam filtering for all your email accounts.

2. Backups

Automated solutions make backing up easier, less costly, and less prone to human error.

3. File Storage

When you need to access large files from multiple locations, storing them on remote servers is often the best option.

4. Client Relationship Management

Cloud-based tools protect sensitive data and prevent losses that can occur when laptops or flash drives go missing.

5. Anti-Spam Solutions –

Route your email through hosted filters to catch spam before it can reach your mail server and potentially infect your network.

Confused by the idea of “cloud computing”? You’re not alone. While some nonprofits are using cloud services for email, security, and client management, many are unsure of just what it is and how it can improve operations. Simply put, cloud computing makes use of resources belonging to a service provider rather than your organization. The provider is responsible for purchasing and maintaining the equipment and licenses while you enjoy benefits like scalability, disaster recovery, and worry-free data management.

What the Cloud Can Do for You

Cloud computing has two distinct components; the first being simple data storage. For example, nonprofits needing to make files accessible to many locations may choose to store them online. This allows users to access files from any computer with an Internet connection.

There’s no need to store sensitive data on local hard drives, thus protecting your donors and clients from exposure if, for example, a laptop is lost or stolen.

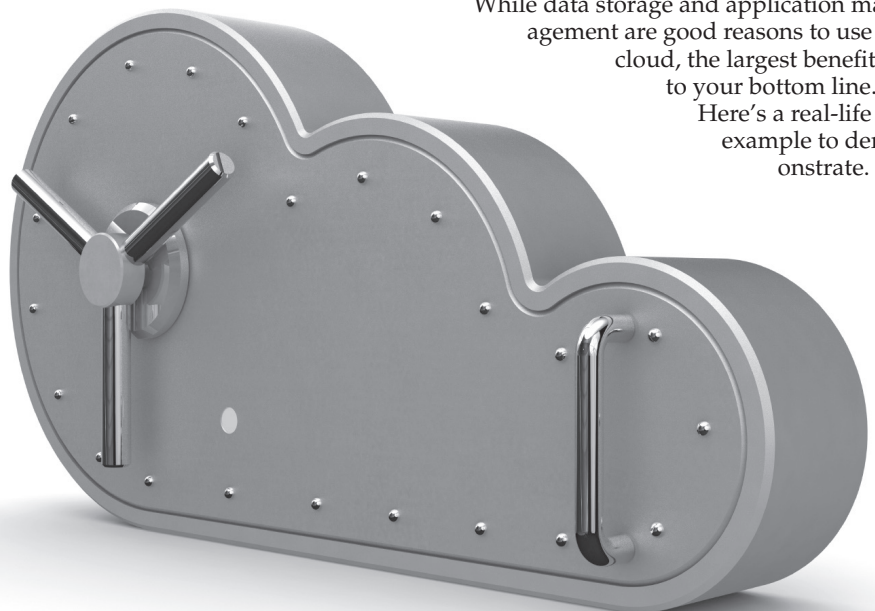
Another benefit of cloud computing is its applications. Just as your personal workstation is equipped with software to perform tasks like word processing, spreadsheet manipulation, and PowerPoint presentations, so are the servers that make up the cloud.

Virtually any job your PC can perform can be accomplished using remote computers. This is an ideal solution for nonprofits which require a larger, temporary staff during fundraising events. SaaS (software as a service) applications can be accessed from any computer with an Internet connection, eliminating expensive licensing and hardware costs and allowing your organization to pay for only what it needs.

The Benefits of Cloud Computing

While data storage and application management are good reasons to use the cloud, the largest benefit is to your bottom line.

Here’s a real-life example to demonstrate.



Cloud computing, while not new, is becoming more accessible as technology advances, making it a good choice for nonprofits of any size. With costs continuing to fall, now might be the perfect time to shift some of your computing power into the cloud.

A nonprofit specializing in caregiving and referrals was able to implement a cloud-based system to manage medical records, allowing their clients a level of privacy and security they could not have achieved on their own. Like most nonprofits, steadily decreasing donations left them cash-strapped, so implementing a custom solution wasn't possible.

Likewise, the expense of new hardware was avoided by purchasing bandwidth and storage space from a provider who already owned and maintained the necessary equipment. In the end, handing the client management aspect of the organization to the cloud was less costly than purchasing and configuring locally installed software, while still allowing the organization to maintain client confidentiality.

Cloud Security

Cloud computing exists on two levels: public and private. Public clouds offer data transfer to any computer with proper credentials. As long as a user has the required log-in information your data can be accessed. Private clouds are managed by a single organization and reside behind a firewall, preventing outside access while still allowing connections from multiple physical locations within the company.

Neither option is without risk, but there are ways to ensure your data is secure. First, if opting for public cloud services, look for vendors who are PCI DSS compliant, Cloud Security Alliance certified, or who hold some other recognized industry credentials. If you decide a private cloud is right for you, ensure that it's set up and

maintained by professionals knowledgeable in cloud security.

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