

What is the CLOUD?

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I don't know about you but I am asked more and more each day about 'the Cloud'. What is it? Where did this concept come from?

[Jaimie Dobson](#) on the [iNet engineers blog](#) explains this in a little more detail...

Traditionally the standard approach to running software on a computer is to install a copy of it on the machine that it was to be used on. The User then works with that software as needed at that particular computer. A cost per User in the form of a 'license fee', payable to the software issuer is needed to keep things nice and legal and any bugs or problems with the software are solved by installing 'patches' or 'updates' either from a floppy disk (as was), CD or as now; from the software vendor's website over the Net. In time the software becomes outdated and the User is pushed into purchasing an 'upgrade' which they then re-install into their individual computer.

Think of Microsoft Word™. That's a piece of word processing software that as a User, you buy a license for, install onto your PC from a CD, download updates from the Microsoft website and in time, purchase an upgrade to the next version. It's how Microsoft and most other software vendors such as Sage™, Adobe™, Norton™ etc, make their money and is serious business on a global scale. If a second User in your office also needs a copy of Word on their PC, then the whole license purchase, install and update process has to be replicated for each additional machine that requires the software on it.

Times are Changing

However there's a new kid on the block when it comes to computing that is really putting the wind-up the major software houses such as Microsoft as it's hitting them hard where it hurts, namely in the license fee revenue department.

The new kid is called Cloud Computing.

Cloud Computing allows Users to access and work with software applications centrally, over the web through their web browser and without the need to purchase and install a piece of software on their computer. The software is installed and managed by the hosting company removing you from any future involvement in maintaining or updating the software.

The big benefits of this as far as the User is concerned are

- The same application can be used on any number of computers so long as they each have a web browser and an Internet connection, like the ones you are using now to view this article. There's no need to install the software on to each machine (unless you have integration software, but that is for another article).
- Updates and upgrades are done centrally by the application host (the company that maintains the software on the web). No need to download updates, install patches etc.
- It tends to be a lot more cost effective as the large upfront costs have been removed. You will typically find that most applications in the "Cloud" are paid on a subscription basis. These can be very different from provider to provider.

- Data is stored centrally on remote servers in the 'Cloud'. This makes the working environment totally portable and independent of any single machine. Imagine, you work on a document in the office using a web based application. Save it. When you get home or move to another office during the day, so long as you can access the web, you can continue working on the same document even if it's someone else's computer.

Why is it called the Cloud?

The concept of the Cloud is pretty simple. In computer diagrams the Internet was always drawn as a cloud. The name has simply carried over as a nickname to any application / software available on the internet.

Examples of Cloud applications

Computer applications that are based on Cloud Computing concepts are already here and are being used by people like you and me, half the time without us even realising it.

[Web based CRM Software](#) are a great example of Cloud computing. Every piece of a business is held within the Cloud, from your custom

Other examples include [Google Apps](#), and it can be said that social networking sites such as [Facebook](#) and [Myspace](#) that store data online and offer interactivity are a form of Cloud Computing.

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I myself use [Google Apps](#), our [web based CRM software](#) is based in the Cloud and I manage and make the most of our [Twitter](#) account using web applications such as [Twitbeep](#).

Whilst Jaimie also uses the [Google Apps](#) cloud applications, he manages his [Twitter](#) account using a web application called [Twithive](#) having switched from a software based one called [TweetDeck](#).



About Jaimie Dobson:

Jaimie Dobson is an Internet consultant with [iNet Engineers](#) who are based in the county of West Yorkshire in the UK. He runs his own [online business development blog](#) which is used to comment upon current Internet strategies, search engine marketing techniques and tips that a business website owner can use for the benefit of their own website. Connect with him on [Twitter](#) to keep us with his updates.

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