THE SMB'S GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL CLOUD MIGRATION

The Purple Guys

Trouble-Free IT Support

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More than a decade after the term "cloud computing" entered popular business vernacular, the technology has finally emerged as the transformative force it promised to be.

90% of small and midsize businesses (SMBs) use cloud computing

Nearly half of SMBs worldwide spend at least $120,000 annually on cloud-related expenditures

Today, 90% of small and midsize businesses (SMBs) use cloud computing in some capacity, and nearly half of SMBs worldwide spend at least $120,000 annually on cloud-related expenditures.

Long-term cost reduction motivates 61% of IT leaders to migrate to the cloud.

While the cost of public cloud usage may seem high, the savings accrue over the long term. In fact, 61% of IT leaders name long-term cost-cutting as the primary reason for adoption. Transitioning to the cloud allows companies to avoid big capital expenses every three to four years. Instead of refreshing server hardware and related licensing — usually a five- or six-figure capital expense — on an ad-hoc basis, businesses can convert spend to a per-user, per-month amount that's fully tax-deductible each year as an operating expense.

Shifting from a CapEx model to an OpEx model makes budgeting easier and typically guarantees that companies have access to the most recent version of whatever software they're using. For instance, a company running email in-house would have to pay to update its email platform to get the latest version, whereas when email is moved to the cloud, a cloud provider keeps that software up-to-date and the associated monthly fee generally stays the same. This means accounting departments don't have to worry about incremental costs associated with licensing updates, making it easier to predict future cash flow.

Cloud adoption also eliminates the compatibility issues that inevitably pop up when a company takes a piecemeal approach to software integration. When everybody on the team gets upgraded at the same time, key business processes can continue uninterrupted, and it's easier to stay in sync with customers and vendors. Plus, companies can avoid operational hiccups that come with aging equipment, measurably improving your efficiency over time.

Of course, cloud adoption is a migration process — a potentially complex one. To ensure a smooth transition and position your business to get the most out of cloud usage for years to come, you'll need a plan.

To avoid business disruption and maximize the benefits of the cloud, make a plan for your cloud migration.

PLAN TO SUCCEED

Every business is unique, and different companies have different requirements that affect transition costs and timelines. In general, however, you should take three critical steps as you create your migration plan:

1. HIRE A QUALIFIED GUIDE

Think of cloud migration like moving to a new house. If you move only once every 10 years, you're probably not an expert. While you could rent a truck and get your friends to help you move, hiring a qualified moving company — someone with checklists and proven procedures (and insurance!) — will make the move easier and far less stressful. To be sure, moving your business to the cloud is a bit more complex than moving to a new home, so it's even more important to find a qualified guide. Choose someone who has done it before, who has created checklists and procedures, and, yes, someone who has insurance! A professional organization will be able to assist you with your move to the cloud, removing stress and creating a plan that fits your business.

Think of cloud migration like moving. Hiring a professional will make the move easier and less stressful.

2. BACK IT UP

A cloud migration involves critical business information that you can't afford to lose, which is the top concern for 65% of enterprise leaders considering cloud adoption. Any time you move data from point A to point B, data can get lost or corrupted. If something goes wrong, restoring from backup is much easier than trying to recreate data. With 48% of SMBs reporting that data loss would probably force them to close their doors permanently, it's clearly a crucial asset. So don't take chances with your data: Back it up before you begin any transition.

Nearly half of SMBs would have to shut down permanently after a data loss, so back yours up before you begin any transition.

3. KNOW YOUR TIMELINE

The volume of data being moved, the number of users involved, and the complexity of the systems being migrated all factor into the timeline for your transition. Plan for the unknown — and unexpected — by adding extra time. When reflecting on the process, 50% of cloud adopters say they would have given themselves more time to migrate. Some business interruption may be inevitable, but you can minimize its impact by planning ahead. You might do one system at a time, starting with your email, then your salesforce tools, and finally your operational software. Typically, the transition occurs on an application-by-application basis. A partner with experience conducting migrations should be able to tell you with reasonable accuracy how long each phase will take, including staging, backups, and testing. Cloud adoption doesn't happen overnight, and when planned properly and done in stages, it can be done efficiently and with minimal business interruption.

To minimize business disruption, plan for the migration process to take more time than you think it will.

Both the immediate and long-term benefits of moving to the cloud typically make the costs associated with the transition worth paying. That's not to say there aren't risks, though. Data loss is probably the one that keeps most SMB leaders up at night, but it can be avoided with proper planning. It's also possible that not all your data will migrate properly or that it won't be organized in the way you've done it up to this point. These are challenges that can be overcome with the right guidance. However, adoption may entail changes to business processes that must be implemented from the inside out, which is why your leadership is critical during the transition period.

There will be a learning curve for employees as they get comfortable working in a cloud environment. As long as there's a good internet connection, the cloud will be accessible no matter where you or your workforce are located. And the way you access applications will change. In the past, you probably sat down at your desk and accessed all of your applications on your local machine. Cloud hosting might mean working from a laptop and going directly to the application website or through a portal, where everything is pulled into one virtual desktop. Ultimately, the network accessibility the cloud provides makes your business more portable and more resilient. But it also means users may have to take extra steps to ensure they're accessing company data via a secure connection.

The cloud offers advanced security features that on-premise data storage typically can't match, but that doesn't mean you can take security for granted. While 66% of enterprises report having a central cloud team or internal cloud center of excellence, SMB leaders may not have the same resources, which makes a codified cloud policy a key ingredient to your long-term success. Security should be adequately addressed during the project-planning phase, and your protocol should include some fundamental best practices.

A CODIFIED CLOUD POLICY IS A KEY INGREDIENT TO YOUR LONG-TERM SUCCESS — AND DATA SECURITY.

For one thing, you'll probably have to keep track of more passwords; a secure, reputable password manager can help your company stay organized. You'll also find that most vendors that provide cloud applications will give you the option to use their built-in, two-factor authenticators. Regardless of whether you decide to use their tools, you should have some sort of multi-factor or two-factor authentication in place when accessing applications in the cloud, which means employees will need to always have a second way of authenticating login credentials (usually a cellphone). That might feel cumbersome at times, but it makes your data far more secure.

MAP YOUR MIGRATION

To reduce friction after adoption, have a plan in place before the migration, and make sure every member of your team receives adequate security and accessibility training prior to ramping up operations in the cloud. You can minimize hiccups by implementing the following four strategies:

1. PRIORITIZE INTEGRATION

Most small businesses have a few critical applications that teams use daily to conduct core business tasks. Law firms, for example, might rely heavily on practice management software; manufacturers might streamline company processes with an ERP system; accounting firms might utilize any number of tax planning and financial tools; and the list goes on. The biggest problem companies in all industries encounter when transitioning to the cloud is integration. That's because a cloud migration is as much a business process as it is a technical transition.

The point of moving to the cloud isn't to replace business applications; it's to improve their efficiency, security, and productivity.

More than one-third of companies in the U.S. say that cloud computing hasn't delivered notable benefits, but that's because many don't view adoption as a core part of broader business transformation. That's a significant oversight. The point of moving to the cloud isn't necessarily to replace existing applications but to improve efficiency, security, and productivity associated with those applications. Many of the vendors licensing the software you currently use also offer cloud-enabled versions of those tools. Lean on these partners as you plan your larger adoption strategy in order to maximize efficiencies and minimize disruptions during the transition.

2. CHECK YOUR CONNECTION

A slow connection is a significant roadblock to getting the most out of cloud usage, and a single connection to the cloud is a single point of failure. Operating in the cloud over a slow connection is like trying to shove a fire hose worth of data through a straw. In the past, speeding up your network connection was often cost-prohibitive or even impossible due to location constraints. Having redundancy in your connectivity was previously also costly for SMBs. Fortunately, this is less of an issue today, as high-speed connectivity options are increasingly available and affordable.

The pace of modern business leaves little room for latency: You need the fastest application performance you can find. Even as applications are getting tweaked to require less bandwidth, cloud providers constantly upgrade their infrastructures to ensure you get it. In the meantime, you can also use features like geolocation and latency-based routing to boost application response times.

Operating in the cloud over a slow connection is like trying to shove a fire hose worth of data through a straw.
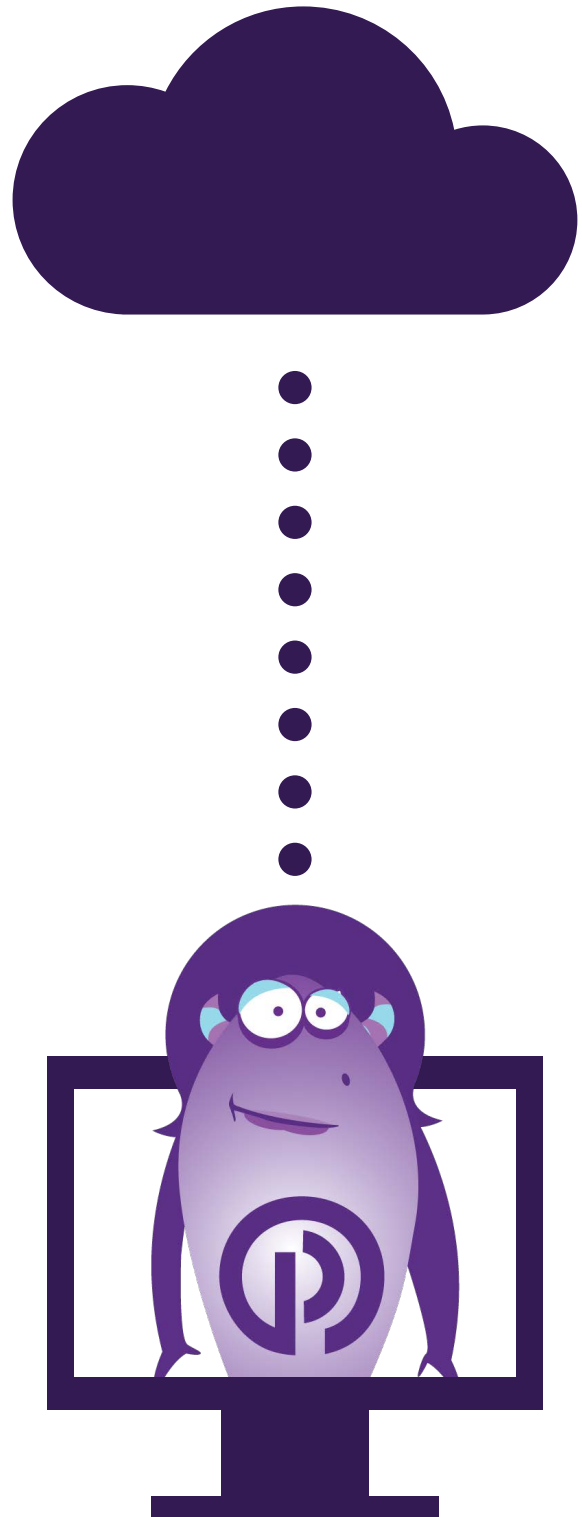
MAP YOUR MIGRATION

3. FIGURE OUT WHAT SHOULD STAY BEHIND

Not every application can — or should — be moved to the cloud. Depending on the nature of your business, it's often advisable to keep some applications within your four walls. If you're running a manufacturing facility, for instance, critical equipment, inventory control, and your parts manufacturer database might all run off a single application. You need a super high-speed connection to your machines to ensure that they're always on and always working, which means it often makes more sense to keep that application running on-premise. Your software vendors and IT service providers will be able to give recommendations on how to plan your migration. Likewise, don't be afraid to talk to other companies in your industry that have made the transition. The more information you can gather from past experiences, the more prepared you'll be when it's time to make the move.

4. TEST AND PROCEED

Whenever possible, create a team of testers comprising representatives from every department who will assist with the planning and testing — before you transition the entire organization. In the past, having a test environment was an unaffordable luxury for most SMBs. The cloud, however, is itself an entirely separate environment, and so it inherently provides that test environment. You can migrate data and test it, often one department at a time, running the systems and software through a series of tests before cutting over to production. Use this cloud ability to try out various scenarios and give your early adopters a chance to learn what it looks and feels like so they can help create training materials for the rest of the organization.

Having an expert guide for planning and migration can make the process more seamless and position you for long-term success after adoption. On top of our nearly two decades of IT experience, The Purple Guys currently provides cloud support to 173 unique small businesses. **We've seen nearly every scenario imaginable, and we can help you understand exactly what to expect before, during, and after your migration.**

Don't take on unnecessary risk by attempting a cloud transition alone. We work with your software vendors to determine how application usage and functionality might change in the cloud and to identify any additional costs you might incur as a result of cloud adoption. Likewise, we'll outline the steps you can take to achieve cost savings at every stage of the transition, helping you optimize your business for success both now and in the future.

EXPERIENCE MATTERS WHEN CONDUCTING CLOUD MIGRATIONS.

Call us at (816) 221-3900 (in Kansas City)
or (314) 696-6700 (in St. Louis)
to find out how our experience can make yours the best it can be.

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