

Introduction to Cloud Computing



Executive Summary

A common understanding of “cloud computing” is continuously evolving, and the terminology and concepts used to define it often need clarifying. Press coverage can be vague or may not fully capture the extent of what cloud computing entails or represents, sometimes reporting how companies are making their solutions available in the “cloud” or how “cloud computing” is the way forward, but not examining the characteristics, models, and services involved in understanding what cloud computing is and what it can become.

This white paper introduces internet-based cloud computing, exploring the characteristics, service models, and deployment models in use today, as well as the benefits and challenges associated with cloud computing. Also discussed are the communications services in the cloud (including ways to access the cloud, such as web APIs and media control interfaces) and the importance of scalability and flexibility in a cloud-based environment.

Also noted for businesses desiring to start using communication services, are the interface choices available, including Web 2.0 APIs, media control interfaces, Java interfaces, and XML based interfaces, catering to a wide range of application and service creation developers.

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Introduction to Cloud Computing

Introduction

This white paper is an introduction to the terms, characteristics, and services associated with internet-based computing, commonly referred to as cloud computing. Characteristics, such as infrastructure, provisioning, network access, and managed metering are presented.

The primary business service models being deployed (such as software, platform, and infrastructure as a service) and common deployment models employed by service providers and users to use and maintain the cloud services (such as the private, public, community, and hybrid clouds) are discussed.

Also introduced are the benefits and challenges associated with cloud computing, and for those seeking to use communications services in the cloud, briefly presented are different ways of determining the interfaces needed to use these communications services.

Cloud Computing

The term “cloud”, as used in this white paper, appears to have its origins in network diagrams that represented the internet, or various parts of it, as schematic clouds. “Cloud computing” was coined for what happens when applications and services are moved into the internet “cloud.” Cloud computing is not something that suddenly appeared overnight; in some form, it may trace back to a time when computer systems remotely time-shared computing resources and applications. More currently though, cloud computing refers to the many different types of services and applications being delivered in the internet cloud, and the fact that, in many cases, the devices used to access these services and applications do not require any special applications.

Many companies are delivering services from the cloud. Some notable examples include the following:

- **Google** — Has a private cloud that it uses for delivering Google Docs and many other services to its users, including email access, document applications, text translations, maps, web analytics, and much more.
- **Microsoft** — Has Microsoft® Office 365® online service that allows for content and business intelligence tools to be moved into the cloud, and Microsoft currently makes its office applications available in a cloud.
- **Salesforce.com** — Runs its application set for its customers in a cloud, and its Force.com and Vmforce.com products provide developers with platforms to build customized cloud services.

But, what is cloud computing? The following sections note cloud and cloud computing characteristics, services models, deployment models, benefits, and challenges.

Characteristics

Cloud computing has a variety of characteristics, with the main ones being:

- **Shared Infrastructure** — Uses a virtualized software model, enabling the sharing of physical services, storage, and networking capabilities. The cloud infrastructure, regardless of deployment model, seeks to make the most of the available infrastructure across a number of users.
- **Dynamic Provisioning** — Allows for the provision of services based on current demand requirements. This is done automatically using software automation, enabling the expansion and contraction of service capability, as needed. This dynamic scaling needs to be done while maintaining high levels of reliability and security.
- **Network Access** — Needs to be accessed across the internet from a broad range of devices such as PCs, laptops, and mobile devices, using standards-based APIs (for example, ones based on HTTP). Deployments of services in the cloud include everything from using business applications to the latest application on the newest smartphones.
- **Managed Metering** — Uses metering for managing and optimizing the service and to provide reporting and billing information. In this way, consumers are billed for services according to how much they have actually used during the billing period.

In short, cloud computing allows for the sharing and scalable deployment of services, as needed, from almost any location, and for which the customer can be billed based on actual usage.

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Service Models

Once a cloud is established, how its cloud computing services are deployed in terms of business models can differ depending on requirements. The primary service models being deployed (see Figure 1) are commonly known as:

- **Software as a Service (SaaS)** — Consumers purchase the ability to access and use an application or service that is hosted in the cloud. A benchmark example of this is Salesforce.com, as discussed previously, where necessary information for the interaction between the consumer and the service is hosted as part of the service in the cloud.

Also, Microsoft has made a significant investment in this area, and as part of the cloud computing option for Microsoft® Office 365, its Office suite is available as a subscription through its cloud-based Online Services.

- **Platform as a Service (PaaS)** — Consumers purchase access to the platforms, enabling them to deploy their own software and applications in the cloud. The operating systems and network access are not managed by the consumer, and there might be constraints as to which applications can be deployed. Examples include Amazon Web Services (AWS), Rackspace and Microsoft Azure.
- **Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)** — Consumers control and manage the systems in terms of the operating systems, applications, storage, and network connectivity, but do not themselves control the cloud infrastructure.

Also known are the various subsets of these models that may be related to a particular industry or market. Communications as a Service (CaaS) is one such subset model used to describe hosted IP telephony services. Along with the move to CaaS is a shift to more IP-centric communications and more SIP trunking deployments. With IP and SIP in place, it can be as easy to have the PBX in the cloud as it is to have it on the premise. In this context, CaaS could be seen as a subset of SaaS.

Software as a Service (SaaS)	Enduser application is delivered as a service. Platform and infrastructure is abstracted, and can be deployed and managed with less effort.
Platform as a Service (PaaS)	Application platform onto which custom applications and services can be deployed. Can be built and deployed more inexpensively, although services need to be supported and managed.
Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)	Physical infrastructure is abstracted to provide computing, storage, and networking as a service, avoiding the expense and need for dedicated systems.

Figure 1. Service Model Types

Deployment Models

Deploying cloud computing can differ depending on requirements, and the following four deployment models have been identified, each with specific characteristics that support the needs of the services and users of the clouds in particular ways (see Figure 2).

- **Private Cloud** — The cloud infrastructure has been deployed, and is maintained and operated for a specific organization. The operation may be in-house or with a third party on the premises.
- **Community Cloud** — The cloud infrastructure is shared among a number of organizations with similar interests and requirements. This may help limit the capital expenditure costs for its establishment as the costs are shared among the organizations. The operation may be in-house or with a third party on the premises.
- **Public Cloud** — The cloud infrastructure is available to the public on a commercial basis by a cloud service provider. This enables a consumer to develop and deploy a service in the cloud with very little financial outlay compared to the capital expenditure requirements normally associated with other deployment options.
- **Hybrid Cloud** — The cloud infrastructure consists of a number of clouds of any type, but the clouds have the ability through their interfaces to allow data and/or applications to be moved from one cloud to another. This can be a combination of private and public clouds that support the requirement to retain some data in an organization, and also the need to offer services in the cloud.

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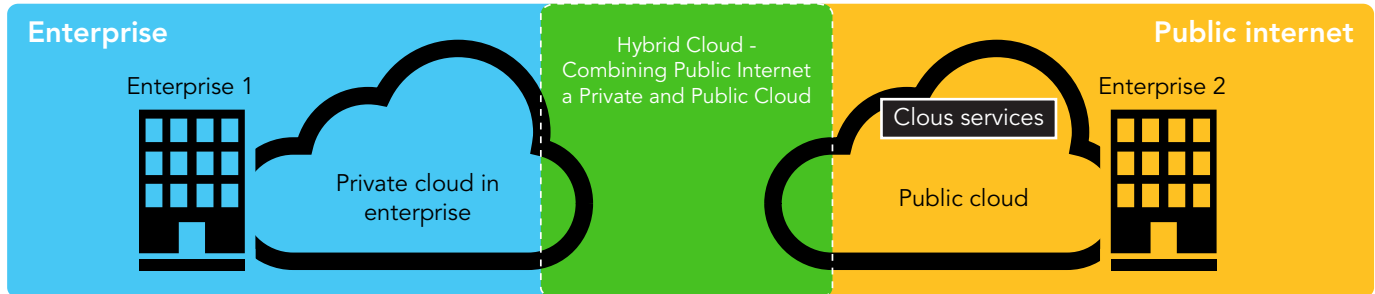


Figure 2. Public, Private, and Hybrid Cloud Deployment Example

Benefits

The following are some of the possible benefits for those who offer cloud computing-based services and applications:

- **Cost Savings** — Companies can reduce their capital expenditures and use operational expenditures for increasing their computing capabilities. This is a lower barrier to entry and also requires fewer in-house IT resources to provide system support.
- **Scalability/Flexibility** — Companies can start with a small deployment and grow to a large deployment fairly rapidly, and then scale back if necessary. Also, the flexibility of cloud computing allows companies to use extra resources at peak times, enabling them to satisfy consumer demands.
- **Reliability** — Services using multiple redundant sites can support business continuity and disaster recovery.
- **Maintenance** — Cloud service providers do the system maintenance, and access is through APIs that do not require application installations onto PCs, thus further reducing maintenance requirements.
- **Mobile Accessible** — Mobile workers have increased productivity due to systems accessible in an infrastructure available from anywhere.

Challenges

The following are some of the notable challenges associated with cloud computing, and although some of these may cause a slowdown when delivering more services in the cloud, most also can provide opportunities, if resolved with due care and attention in the planning stages.

- **Security and Privacy** — Perhaps two of the more “hot button” issues surrounding cloud computing relate to storing and securing data, and monitoring the use of the cloud by the service providers. These issues are generally attributed to slowing the deployment of cloud services. These challenges can be addressed, for example, by storing the information internal to the organization, but allowing it to be used in the cloud. For this to occur, though, the security mechanisms between organization and the cloud need to be robust and a Hybrid cloud could support such a deployment.
- **Lack of Standards** — Clouds have documented interfaces; however, no standards are associated with these, and thus it is unlikely that most clouds will be interoperable. The Open Grid Forum is developing an Open Cloud Computing Interface to resolve this issue and the Open Cloud Consortium is working on cloud computing standards and practices. The findings of these groups will need to mature, but it is not known whether they will address the needs of the people deploying the services and the specific interfaces these services need. However, keeping up to date on the latest standards as they evolve will allow them to be leveraged, if applicable.
- **Continuously Evolving** — User requirements are continuously evolving, as are the requirements for interfaces, networking, and storage. This means that a “cloud,” especially a public one, does not remain static and is also continuously evolving.
- **Compliance Concerns** — The Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) in the US and Data Protection directives in the EU are just two among many compliance issues affecting cloud computing, based on the type of data and application for which the cloud is being used. The EU has a legislative backing for data protection across all member states, but in the US data protection is different and can vary from state to state. As with security and privacy mentioned previously, these typically result in Hybrid cloud deployment with one cloud storing the data internal to the organization.

Communications in the Cloud

For service developers, making services available in the cloud depends on the type of service and the device(s) being used to access it. The process may be as simple as a user clicking on the required web page, or could involve an application using an API accessing the services in the cloud.

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Telcos are starting to use clouds to release their own services and those developed by others, but using Telco infrastructure and data. The expectation is that the Telco's communications infrastructure provides a revenue generating opportunity.

Using the Communications Services

When in the cloud, communications services can extend their capabilities, or stand alone as service offerings, or provide new interactivity capabilities to current services.

Cloud-based communications services enable businesses to embed communications capabilities into business applications, such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems. For "on the move" business people, these can be accessed through a smartphone, supporting increased productivity while away from the office.

These services are over and above the support of service deployments of VoIP systems, collaboration systems, and conferencing systems for both voice and video. They can be accessed from any location and linked into current services to extend their capabilities, as well as stand alone as service offerings.

In terms of social networking, using cloud-based communications provides click-to-call capabilities from social networking sites, access to Instant Messaging systems and video communications, broadening the interlinking of people within the social circle.

Accessing through Web APIs

Accessing communications capabilities in a cloud-based environment is achieved through APIs, primarily Web 2.0 RESTful APIs, allowing application development outside the cloud to take advantage of the communication infrastructure within it (see Figure 3).

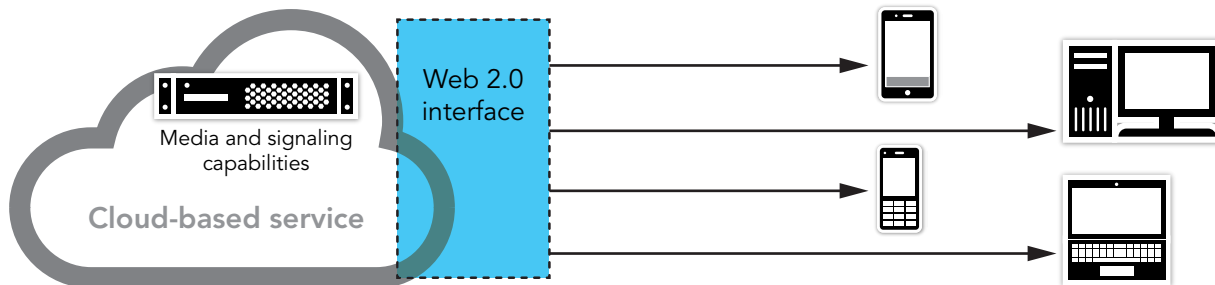


Figure 3. Web 2.0 Interfaces to the Cloud

These APIs open up a range of communications possibilities for cloud-based services, only limited by the media and signaling capabilities within the cloud. Today's media services allow for communications and management of voice and video across a complex range of codecs and transport types. By using the Web APIs, these complexities can be simplified and the media can be delivered to the remote device more easily. APIs also enable communication of other services, providing new opportunities and helping to drive Average Revenue per User (ARPU) and attachment rates, especially for Telcos.

Media Server Control Interfaces

When building communications capabilities into the "core of the cloud," where they will be accessed by another service, the Web 2.0 APIs can be used, as well as a combination of SIP or VoiceXML and the standard media controlling APIs such as MSML, MSCML, and JSR309. The combinations provide different capability sets, but with MediaCTRL being developed in the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), it is expected that MediaCTRL will supersede MSML and MSCML and have an upsurge in availability and more developments after it is ratified. JSR309 is a notable choice for those seeking Java development, as it provides the Java interface to media control.

Figure 4 is an example of accessing services in the cloud through Web 2.0 and media control interface APIs.

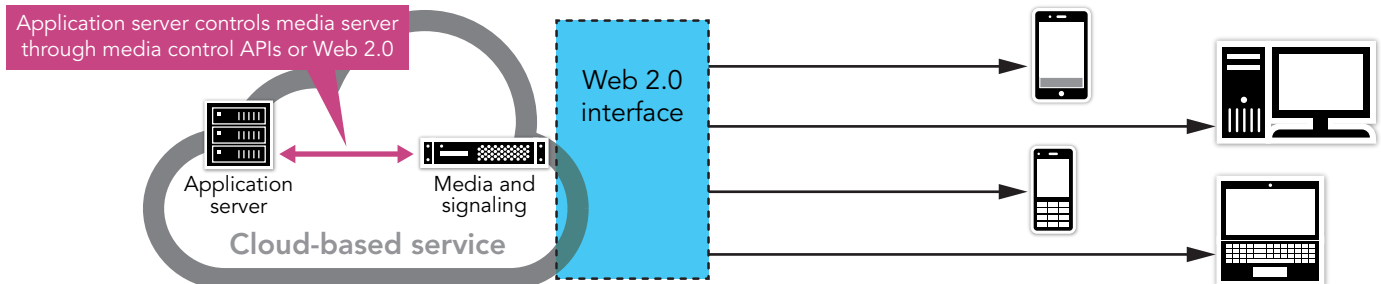


Figure 4. Accessing the Communications Capabilities from Within the Cloud

Whether businesses are deploying communications services for access from outside of or within the cloud, the environment is one that supports the speedy development and rollout of these capabilities.

Communications Scalability

To deliver on the scalability requirements for cloud-based deployments, the communications software should be capable of running in virtual environments. This allows for easily increasing and decreasing session densities based on the needs at the time, while keeping the physical resource requirement on servers to a minimum.

Getting Started with Communications Services

Businesses desiring to use the communications capabilities of cloud-based services will stand to benefit by determining the right interfaces.

Dialogic supports a broad range of interfaces, including RESTful APIs, media control interfaces, Java interfaces, and XML-based interfaces, catering to a wide range of application and service creation developers. These interfaces, available over media and signaling capabilities, support the scalability needed in a cloud-based environment while still being easy to deploy and administer.



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