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Your guide to the Cloud

Getting your business off the ground.

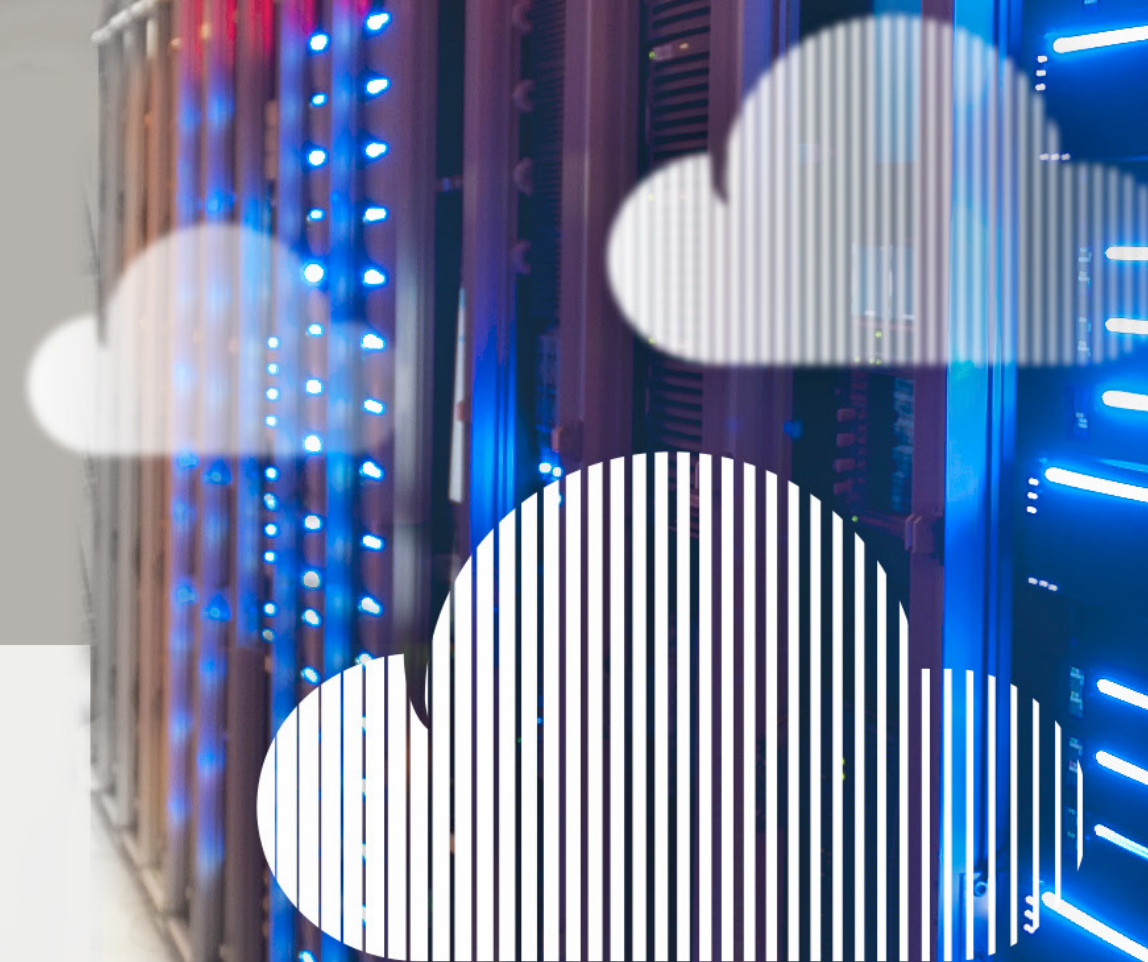# Inside this guide

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SECTION 1

Getting started

What's it all about?

Everyone seems to agree the Cloud is important. But what does that mean exactly? Why is it important? And how can it benefit your business?

This is your guide to the Cloud. Everything you wanted to know, and everything you were afraid to ask. So, let's start at the beginning: what is the Cloud?

Well, in a way, it's just another name for the internet. It's made up of all the computers (or, more correctly, servers) that don't live in your office but that you can access via an internet connection.

So, when you buy something from Amazon, book a train ticket, or do almost anything online, you send information from your phone, tablet or PC. But the 'thing', the actual purchase itself, happens on their servers which are on the internet, or in 'the Cloud'.

And because the internet is a very easy way to access stuff, the type of 'services' or 'apps' now available online go much further than traditional websites. As a business, we can now do our accountancy, manage a complex project, send emails to thousands of people or complete dozens of other tasks – all online.

Collectively, these are known as 'cloud apps' or 'cloud services'. And when people ask: 'Are you using the Cloud?' this is typically what they mean.

Make sense?

They said:

"Cloud technology is enabling start-ups to get off the ground, established businesses grow, and empowering managers to make better informed decisions."

Connectivity made simple: how the Cloud can benefit your SME, The Telegraph, Feb 17

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SECTION 2

Making the case for cloud

The Cloud answers many of the problems that small businesses face.

1 Smash customer service out of the park

Everyone talks about putting the customer first. But it's not easy. The time and attention it takes to deliver your core business is a strict mistress, and finding the time or resource to give customers the best possible experience of your brand is a constant battle.

Knowing your customers

The right cloud app can knit customer experience into everyone's daily routine. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) services give you the power to truly know your customers.

When they drop by or call up, anyone in your team can quickly retrieve their details from one central location, glance through their purchase history and start the right conversation – without the annoying repetitive questions. And we all know that people who remember us feel like people we'd rather do business with.

You can even use this data to create personalised offers and automated marketing, based on that customer's preferences.
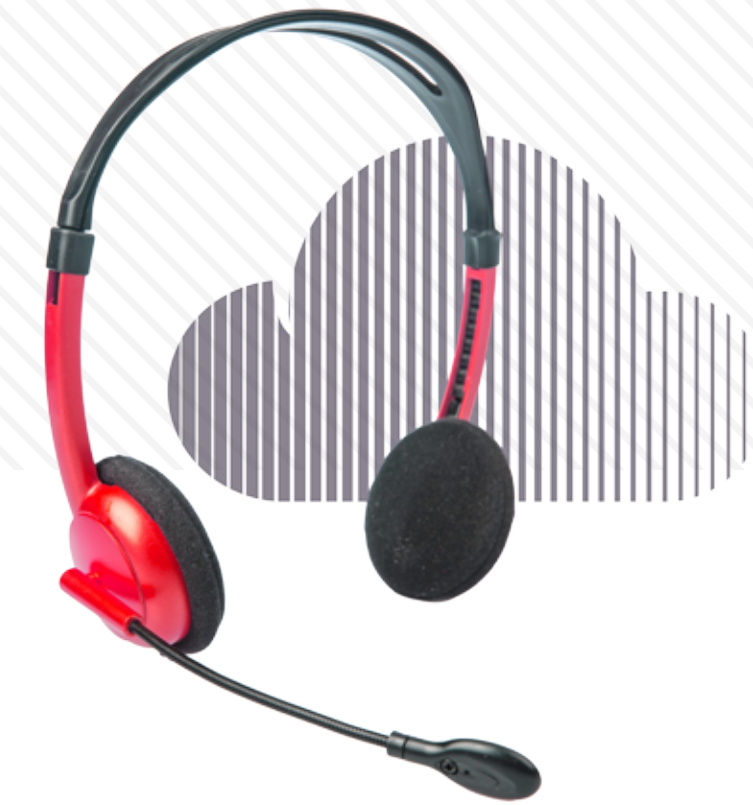
Fact

"SMBs using cloud technology to overcome their growth challenges grow 26% faster and deliver 21% higher gross profits."

Small Business, Big Technology: How the Cloud enables rapid growth in SMBs, Deloitte, Sep 14

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2 Throw a ring of steel around your business

Having the data stored off-site takes the pressure off you; in the worst-case scenario, where something happened to your servers, you'd know all your data is still secure. Why? Because companies like Microsoft spend millions on making their servers bulletproof. It's literally military grade security, and you get to benefit from it.

Personal data about your customers and employees is subject to Data Protection laws. Meanwhile, you also need to fiercely guard any intellectual property you believe gives you a competitive advantage. But any hack into your system isn't going to be helpful – being compromised digitally is a stressful experience.

So, do you need to stock up on in-house servers to store the data and expensive security systems to keep them safe?

Keeping everything safe with cloud

By utilising cloud services, automatic software patches and updates will likely be applied as soon as they're released giving you peace of mind that you're protected.

Plus, if you transfer all of your critical and sensitive data to the Cloud, you might be able to be a little more open elsewhere. After all, there's less intrusion threat from offering guest WiFi if your internal network doesn't directly store your customer database and employee records.

They said

"Perhaps the most obvious benefit of hybrid cloud technology… is that SMEs are presented with enterprise class IT capabilities at a much lower cost."

Connectivity made simple: how the Cloud can benefit your SME, The Telegraph, Feb 17

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3

Collaborate
– any time, any place

So, it's the weekend. All your data is locked away in your shop, factory, warehouse or office. You've got a big presentation for a potential investor and customer on Monday morning. You're already working with the MD via email, honing it to perfection. But there's a key piece of data you're both missing that's sitting on your company's server.

Time to get in the car and lose precious hours of relaxation. Or, you could host it in the Cloud.

Seamless working

Not only is your data accessible anytime, anywhere once you're cloud-based, but there are lots of specific apps and productivity tools to help you collaborate more effectively.

For starters, the deck you're working on could be managed in an app allowing you to improve the slides in real-time while you're on a video conference together, while the app applies version control so nothing is lost in the process.

It means even location is now becoming less of an issue for many startups, who are basing themselves where property prices are cheaper and the quality of life is higher, and then collaborating with whoever they need to, wherever they might be that day.

At its heart, it's about enjoying more control over your work-life balance – something that's a huge draw to staff who crave the extra freedom and flexibility of working from anywhere, on any device.
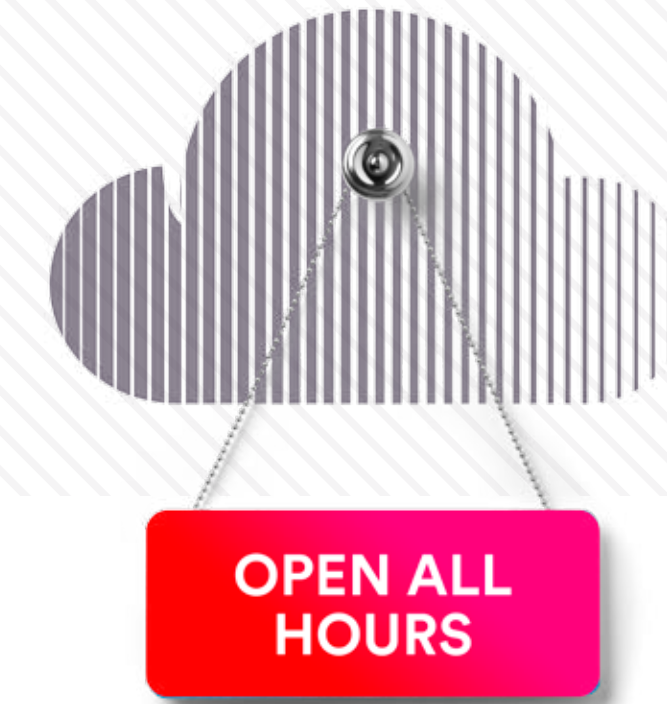
They said

"47% of respondents gave mobility and remote working as their primary reason for cloud adoption."

Small Business, Big Technology: How the Cloud enables rapid growth in SMBs, Deloitte, Sep 14

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4 Get the dull stuff done with less effort

You probably didn't get in to business to do admin. But invoicing, accounts, scheduling and payroll is, at least before you grow to a significant size, a big part of what you or your core team need to do.

And that's leaving you less time to focus on the aspects of the business you fell in love with.

Take the pain out of admin

Making general business admin easier and quicker is now a business model itself. Which is why there's been a proliferation of services in the Cloud. Not only have cloud apps made complex tasks like book keeping easier but it's had the knock-on effect that the to-do list is now quicker to race through.

And these benefits are relevant whatever the size or type of business you run.

For instance, skilled tradespeople such as builders, gardeners and fitness instructors who work outside their home now have all their data at their fingertips constantly. Useful if you remember you need to send out that invoice – or book an appointment. You can do the admin even when on top of some scaffolding, mopping up a spill, or running across the park.

And, as you grow, your new colleagues will be able to do the same.

Fact

"86% of those surveyed believe the Cloud enables their business to scale and grow faster."

Small Business, Big Technology: How the Cloud enables rapid growth in SMBs, Deloitte, Sep 14

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5

Make even better decisions

Cloud systems are also great at getting you better information. And with better information you make better decisions.

Unlike old school desktop applications, cloud apps are often based around dashboards – quick overviews of the most essential information. But click and you can often segment and look at your data in new and interesting ways, finding new insight into what's driving success (or failure) in your business.

Joined-up data

This is, in part, possible because cloud systems have been developed to integrate with each other easily. Many applications can talk to other applications – so you can see all the metrics in your business in many places.

For instance, by using a cloud payment system, high street and online retailers can flow the revenue records straight into their accountancy app. So, you instantly get a view of when you're most profitable – perhaps suggesting which lines to merchandise most prominently at different times of day.

With joined-up data the potential becomes almost limitless. In fact, cloud-based integrations have made entirely new business models possible. You just can't do things like same day delivery for your customers if your payment, stock, customer data and logistics apps don't all talk to each other in real time.
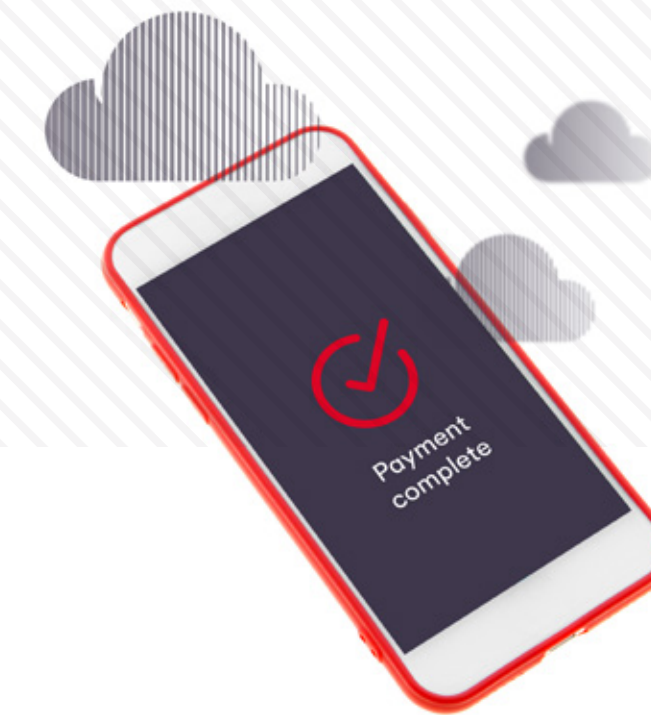
Fact

"By 2020 it is estimated that 78% of small businesses are expected to host their IT environments in the Cloud."

IDC, Worldwide SMB Public IT Cloud Services 2014–2018 Forecast, Oct 14

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6 Save money every day

There are no upfront costs or opex required with moving to the cloud, (unlike, say, installing a server). All the difficult, technical stuff is handled in industrial-strength (and sized) data centres, by someone else. There are little to no running costs – no maintenance costs. No breakdown costs. Managing and running on-site equipment costs a lot and if it breaks... you have to pay for it.

As payments are on monthly or yearly payment schedules, you know exactly what you need to pay and when – nothing unexpected is going to need to be paid for, so you can plan ahead.

Talk is cheap (now)

WiFi cares little about geography, so it makes sense to move calls to the Cloud.

With a switch to Voice over IP (VoIP) not only will the cost of internal phone calls within your business be virtually eliminated, your external phone bills could also shrink.
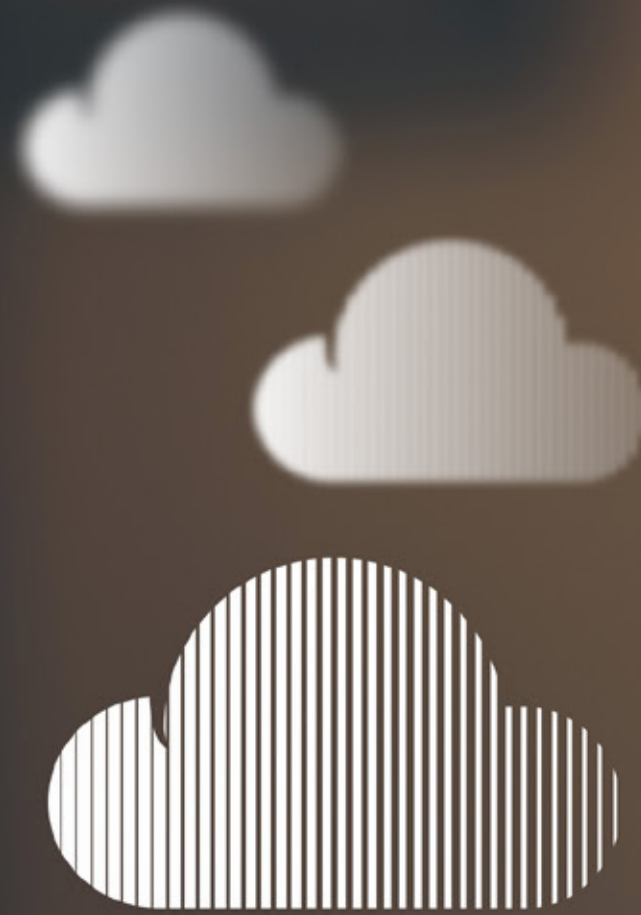
So, free up your employees to communicate with customers, suppliers and each other – whenever they need to and wherever they are in the world.

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SECTION 3

Before
you go...

The Cloud answers many of the
problems that small businesses face.

Apps to get you started

Every business needs the tools to harness the power of the Cloud. Here are two great apps we recommend to help you get up and running. Take full advantage of the Cloud's power to make collaboration, sharing, and working anywhere, easier. Enjoy.

Dropbox Business

Share, sync and collaborate on files securely

Dropbox Business is your passport to:

- Sharing data easily with colleagues, partners, supplier and contractors – and keeping track of it.

- Giving your team an easy-to-use way to access content across any device.

- Securing your business and nailing those industry regulations, without the worry or effort.

It's more collaboration. More time saved. More money saved. And better customer experiences.

Office 365

Get data flowing around your business

Take Office stalwarts like Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and more, add the power and flexibility of the Cloud, and you get Office 365.

Office 365 puts all your apps, emails and files at your fingertips, wherever you go, making it an obvious partner for ultrafast broadband and the Cloud.

- Always up-to-date. Never buy a new version of Office again!

- Professional users can install Office on up to 5 PCs or Macs.

- Save to the Cloud for back up and anywhere access.

- Use Office on smartphones and tablets.

Unleashing your Digital Potential

Add Voom Fibre on top, and you'll have unleashed your businesses from the shackles of compromise. Because when your business uses ultrafast broadband, you get the best cloud services experience possible.

Fact

"69% of respondents expect to increase their use of cloud-based technology in the next three years."

Small Business, Big Technology: How the Cloud enables rapid growth in SMBs, Deloitte, Sep 2014

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But don't take our word for it...

The world's biggest businesses are harnessing the power of the Cloud.

"Small businesses are increasingly taking advantage of cloud-based solutions as part of their digital transformation strategy because they enable them to be more productive, agile and accelerate ideas into revenue. When technology truly works, you forget it's there. Dropbox Business unites devices, apps and offices, letting small teams have a big impact with lean resources.

So, small businesses don't have to worry about their costly legacy file server or dread the thought of collaborating on the go with anyone. Instead, they're able to focus purely on their goals. They can work without limits - to drive growth, unlock opportunities and unleash their creativity."

Simon Aldous, Head of EMEA Channels at Dropbox

"Organisations that empower their people with the latest tools, like Office 365, that foster collaboration and enable flexible, mobile working are discovering that these are the key staff that are driving their businesses forward."

Microsoft UK Enterprise Team

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Unleash your business

Want to make the most of the Cloud? We've got all the tools, advice, and services you need to unleash your business.

- Ultrafast broadband gives you up to 350Mbps from just £30 a month – no one can run cloud applications as quickly and efficiently as us.

- Upload and download huge amounts of data to the Cloud, without slowing everything else down.

- Enjoy preferential rates on top apps like Microsoft Office 365 and Dropbox Business when you pair with Voom Fibre. The more you spend, the bigger the discount.

- Consolidate everything. Get apps from the same supplier you get broadband from, making it easier to keep track of everything.

Fact

"Small businesses with growing revenue are 50% more likely to prefer cloud IT delivery."

IDC, Worldwide SMB Public IT Cloud Services 2014–2018 Forecast, Oct 14

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Thank you

Ready to find out more? Head over to:
virginmediabusiness.co.uk/applications/business-applications
or chat to one of our experts on:

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