

You know it's time to move. Here is how to pick the right cloud delivery provider.

Seemingly every week, a new cloud delivery service pops up, offering something bigger and better than the one before.

This is our world. We will have various providers throughout the course of life and business. It's a multi- service landscape, but with so much choice, you need to choose a service provider that's right for the time and place you're at with your business.

How do you know it's time to change? Perhaps your current provider let you down on customer service or worse, had a lapse in security that could have proven dangerous. Another reason is that you've updated your software and your current provider isn't compatible with that, or your level of growth has outstripped their scope.

Whatever the reason, the quest for change always begins with obvious questions: how long has the provider been in business as a "cloud provider"? What is their track record? How often does the provider test their back-up and recovery procedures? Do they have capacity to increase your storage? What measures are in place to prevent unauthorised access to client data? Where is the data stored? Do they meet data privacy requirements in your industry and location?

This brings me to my next point for discussion, which is evaluating a potential vendor's resilience and expertise when dealing with real life crises. Has the vendor withstood real time downturns? For instance, the fall-out from the dot com crash in the late '90s affected even the biggest IT companies, as did the global financial crisis. The uncertainty of our times continues, so it's vital to make sure that your provider has a proven track record in being able to survive a significant downturn in the economy.

In the same vein, try to find out how up to date your provider's infrastructure is. What plans and policies are in place with regard to upgrading and renewing equipment? These are good indicators of your provider's vision for the future, as well as their capacity plans and growth expectations.

Another thing that's inevitable in today's marketplace is innovation, so what is the provider's attitude to testing and piloting new technologies? In a few years time, your business — and the technologies that go with it — will likely have moved on. So, it pays to check that your



provider adopts a progressive approach when it comes to embracing digital change. What is their policy with regard to testing and piloting new technologies? The last thing you want is to be burdened with an out of date system or a provider that only has the same offering year in and year out.

Next, the incidence of a security breach has become a reality for both small business and large global enterprises, so a key question for your provider will be around their risk management policy.

You should also find out if the cloud service provider's own business operations have resilient redundancies in place that are tied to adequate alternate services to keep their operations running if necessary. And if so, does this cover all vital areas such as operations, communications and links, equipment and key personnel? If phone lines are down, how would they communicate with you and vice versa? In general, what is their level of engagement, customer service and support?

The considerations outlined so far are all designed to help you evaluate the physical, financial and technical capacity of your potential cloud provider. But there are two final considerations you need to make before embarking on a higher cloud route.

First, evaluate any new cloud solutions on a total cost of ownership basis. Will moving to the provider benefit your bottom line? Look at the savings you can make in terms of employee time, licensing schemes and risk mitigation rather than just comparing the cost of hardware.

And second, see if your provider is easy to do business with. Rather than just basing your decision on the attitude of the sales team, also try to meet the technical support and administrative team as once you sign on, they will form the bulk of your dealings.

Everyone offers testimonials and references — that's just like a resume and any provider is only going to show you what they want you to see. To dig deeper you need to see if you can spend a couple of hours at another customer's office, speaking with their executives and key people. I would also advise you do an interview a customer who's left. Ask for these types of references from a provider and you'll get a clear picture of what this company stands for.

Moving to the cloud with a terrific provider is a marvellous thing — but transition is fragile and can really make or break the relationship. Just like an engagement precedes a marriage, so too orchestrate a semi committed trial period with your chosen service provider. Whatever investment you make in a trial could be a slight stretch now, but it's 100% cheaper than making the wrong call long-term and the ramifications that come with that.

Good luck! If you want to know more, you can [get our e-book on choosing the right cloud provider here.](#)

