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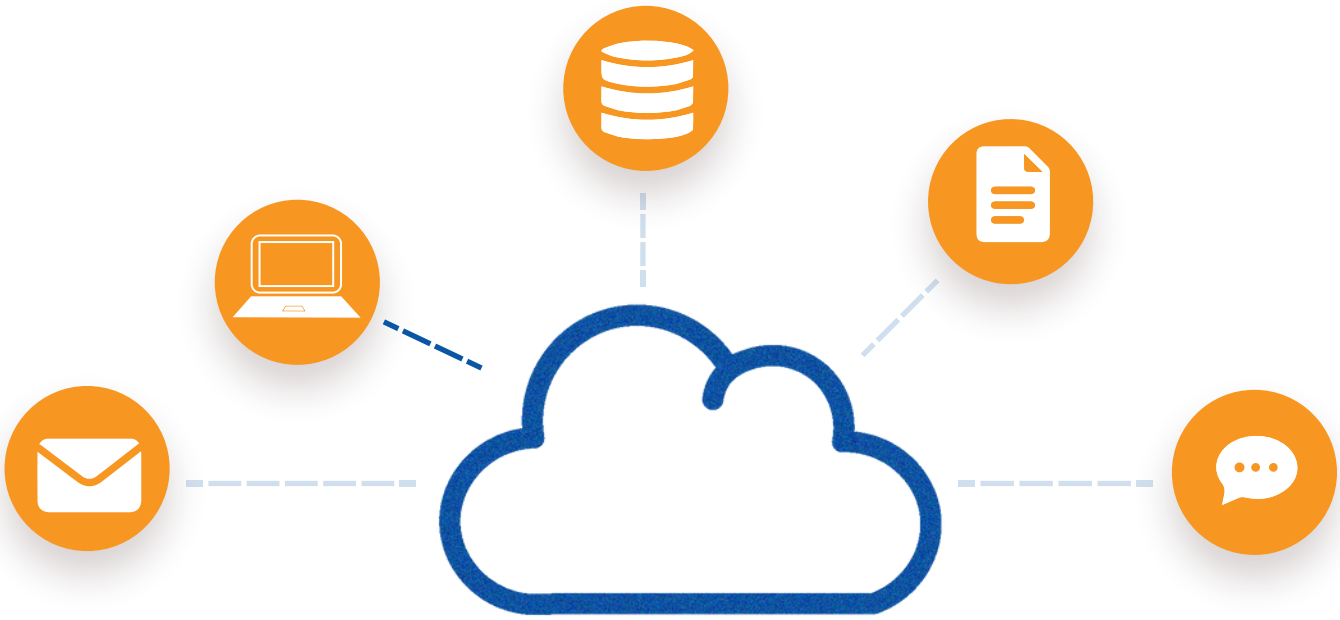
UNDERSTANDING THE CLOUD

WITHOUT GETTING TECHNICAL



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Everywhere you look, people are talking about THE CLOUD like it's going to save humanity.

For everyday professionals, these big claims can be a little tough to believe: why would something supposedly so important have a silly name like "the Cloud", and why is it so hard to understand, anyway?

If you'd like to have a better working understanding of the Cloud that doesn't drown you with boring technical details, then this guide is for you. In it, we'll cover:

- A nontechnical explanation of the Cloud (and how it's different than on-premise)
- Ways you might already be using the Cloud (even if you don't realise)
- Why the Cloud is a better option than on-premise (and what the heck that means, too)
- Cloud trends that look to change the way business operates in the coming decade

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The Cloud Explained
— In Regular Language

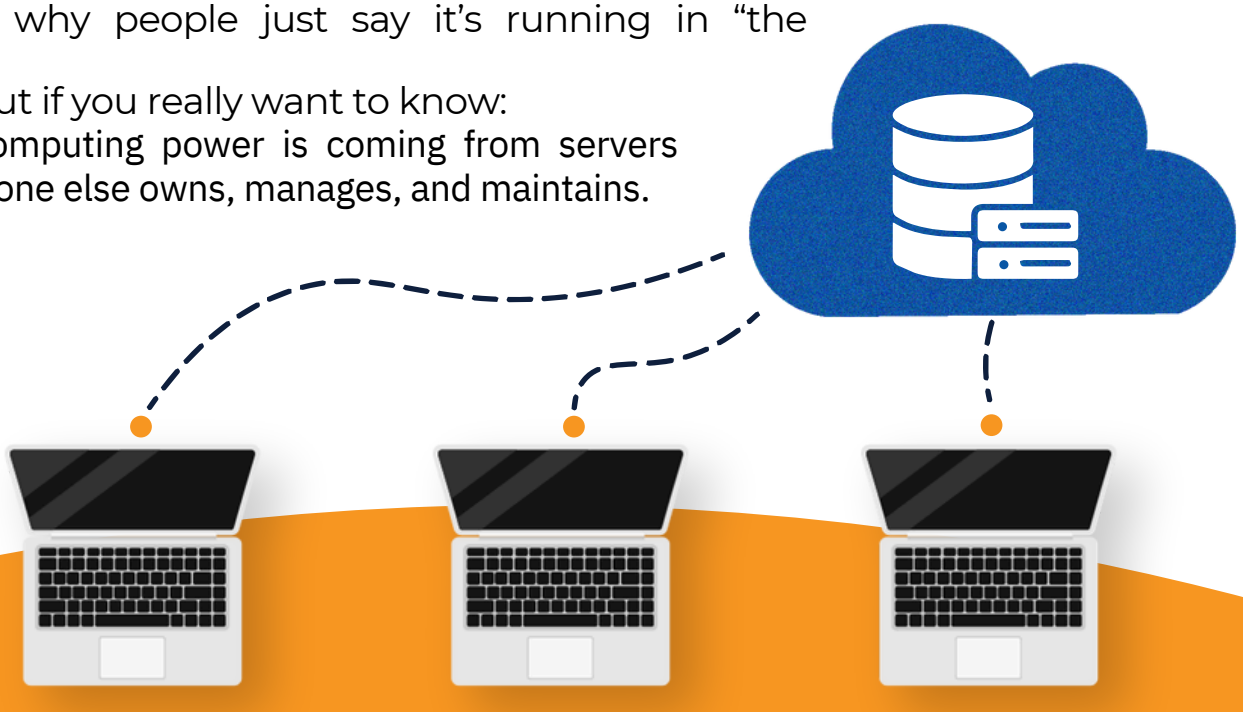
Let's dive in with a definition of the Cloud.

The Cloud is a general term for a whole bunch of different technologies (that's part of why "the Cloud" ends up being so nebulous for so many people). All of these technologies don't rely on your computer to actually do the computing required. And they don't rely on the servers your business has in a server room or data center somewhere, either.

"Technologies" here could be as simple as applications and web services — anything you do for work in a browser, like logging into Microsoft 365 or Salesforce or whatever other business tools you use that run in a browser tab. They can get a lot more complicated, too, like virtual machines and complex data operations and a thousand other things.

So if these technologies aren't relying on your computer or your servers, how are they operating at all?

Instead, all the brains and brawn (computing power) required to run Cloud technologies is somewhere else. Where exactly doesn't usually matter, which is why people just say it's running in "the Cloud." But if you really want to know: all that computing power is coming from servers that someone else owns, manages, and maintains.



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How the Cloud Differs from On Premises

Before the Cloud was a thing, your business would've run all its business applications using computing power available at your place of work, or on premises. Your individual PCs ran Word and Excel (which is why they got super slow when you had too many applications running). Your servers took care of the big stuff, like the behind-the-scenes applications that make your business tick.

With the Cloud, you no longer have to worry about all that. The computing power is someone else's problem;

you simply pay your Cloud provider for the resources you need and keep your focus on the work in front of you.

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Think of it this way:

operating on premise is kind of like buying a car (probably an older one) and doing all the maintenance, repairs, and upgrades yourself. You either pay to keep a mechanic (an IT staff) around, or you learn everything about maintaining that vehicle so you can do it yourself. And if a really big issue pops up, you might pay for a tow (a specialist to come and fix it).

But operating in the Cloud is kind of like a high-end lease:

you get the latest technology and features, someone else handles the maintenance, and if it breaks down, it's someone else's problem entirely.

This illustration isn't perfect:

everyone knows that a high-end lease is way more expensive than buying outright, and that isn't exactly the case with the Cloud.

But in terms of what you're on the hook to know, understand, and do yourself, it's a pretty good analogy.

You're Already Using the Cloud, Maybe More than You Expect

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Now that we've gotten a basic definition and understanding of the Cloud vs. on premise, let's talk about how and where you're almost certainly already using it.

Like we mentioned earlier, if you open your internet browser and log into any particular tool or service to get work done, you're operating in the Cloud. Every time you do work in an online Word document (in Microsoft 365) or a Google Doc (in Google Workspace), your computer isn't actually doing the work. (OK, technically, it's doing a little: it has to handle rendering what actually shows up on your screen.)

But any computation necessary to make that work happen?

That's running on a Google server somewhere.

Even some desktop applications are actually sneaky cloud apps: they look and feel like they're running locally, but behind the scenes, they're doing exactly what your browser-based apps do.

One example of this: Adobe Creative Cloud. Adobe's Creative Suite has long been a standard in creative industries, and it's always been an obnoxious resource hog. It took up all the oxygen in the room, leaving no computing power for the rest of what you needed to do.

But now, with Adobe Creative Cloud, most of that computing doesn't happen on your computer. **It happens on a server somewhere else and is delivered to your computer via the internet.**

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Why On-Premise Is Becoming a Liability

We'll be the first to admit that there's a little too much marketing hype about the Cloud:
if you turn to the Cloud, we doubt every single problem your business has ever faced will instantly be solved.

But for most businesses — especially those with a lower level of technical expertise and/or a higher rate of growth — the Cloud makes all sorts of sense.

The reasons why mostly come back to lower complexity, higher scalability and capability, and (often) lower, or at least more predictable, costs.

But benefits aren't the only factor here. Sticking with an on-premises setup is increasingly becoming a liability. These are just a few reasons.

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Physical Damage and Disaster Risk

First, organisations face a much higher risk of physical damage to on-premises servers. This damage could happen numerous ways:

- A physical mistake damaging hardware **(impact damage, water damage, etc.)**
- An intentional act of sabotage
- Business espionage
- Natural disaster **(flooding, fire, earthquake damage, etc.)**

Each of these could happen at a Cloud provider's data center, too, but the risks are much lower. Cloud providers typically back up data, keeping multiple instances in multiple places (though you should be sure to know what your provider's policies are on this!).

Not to mention, it would be logistically much more difficult to intentionally sabotage or steal your business's data at a Cloud data center:

those TV and movie shots of spies navigating endless rows of server racks aren't too far from reality.

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Remote Work Challenges

While it's possible to work remotely in an on-premise environment (many businesses did exactly this during the early days of COVID), it isn't ideal. Accessing on-premise resources is complicated and resource-intensive. Accessing resources in the Cloud is arguably the same experience no matter where people are.

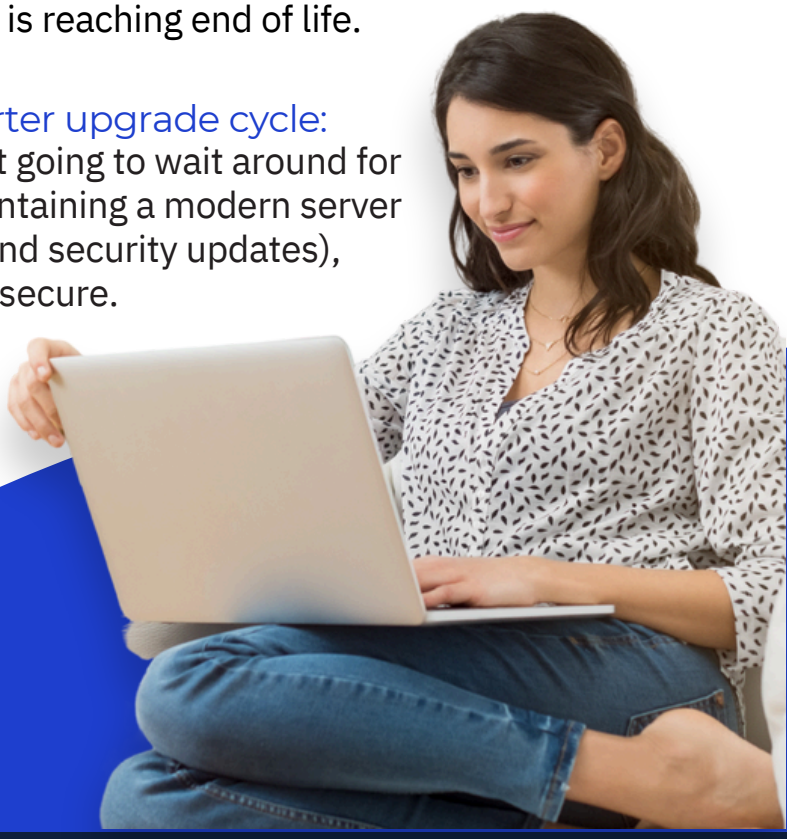
Vulnerability

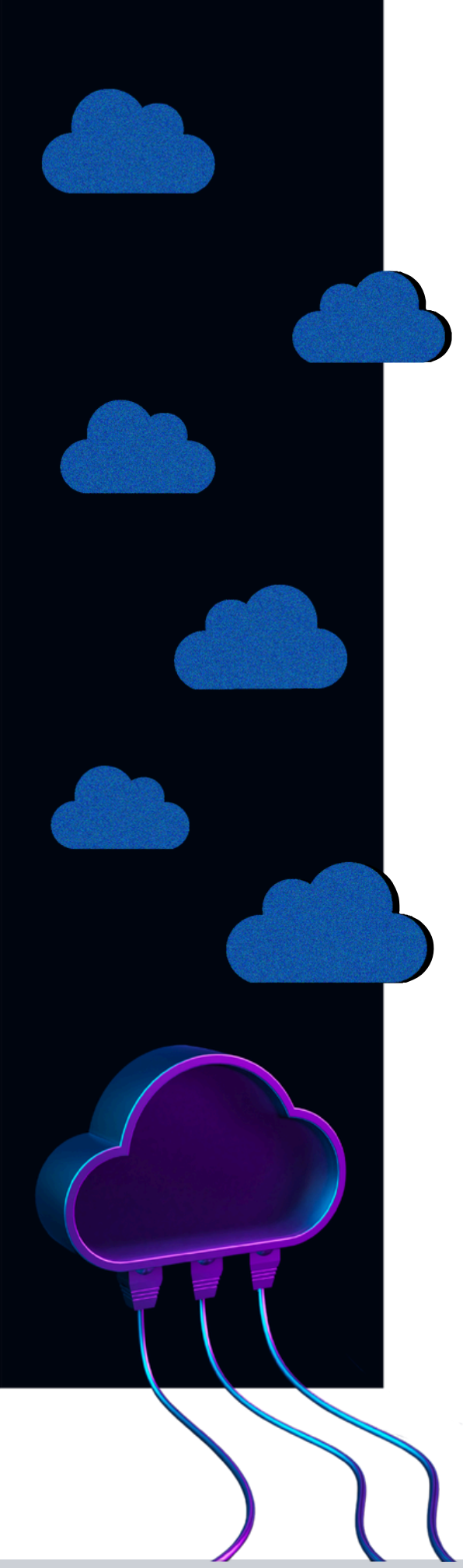
Last, on-premises deployments tend to be more vulnerable in several ways. Even highly technical companies with large IT departments rarely if ever maintain the same level of competence and cutting-edge technology as Google, AWS, and other massive Cloud providers.

Put simply, do you trust your IT security team (if you have one) more than Google's? (Hint: you probably shouldn't!)

On-premise deployments also age poorly: a server with Windows Server 2012 could be just as old and might not even be capable of upgrading, even though Server 2012 is reaching end of life.

Cloud servers are on a much shorter upgrade cycle: Google and AWS (and the rest) aren't going to wait around for a server to get that outdated. By maintaining a modern server fleet (that can handle the latest OS and security updates), Cloud providers are inherently more secure.





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Cloud Trends

As the Cloud continues to evolve, certain business trends are coming soon — or are already in progress.

First, businesses are using the Cloud to scale up and down faster and more easily than would ever be possible on-premise. Need more computing power? It's as simple as a few clicks (and could even be automatic). With on-premise, once you max out your servers you literally can't get any more power without procuring another one — something that costs a lot and takes weeks if not months.

We're also entering an era of what some would call Cloud inevitability: for all but the largest and most technically competent businesses, a move to the Cloud seems nearly inevitable. Some business tools (Intuit QuickBooks for one) are pouring all their development budget into their Cloud products and leaving their on-premise versions to wither on the vine.

If this is the last decade for onsite servers, then consider: does it really make sense to buy one more?

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Ready for the Cloud?

Moving to the Cloud is a strategic decision for most businesses, but it pays to make sure your business is ready for that move.

If you're ready to evaluate your options or get started, reach out to our expert team today!

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