

## Cloud Computing Intersects with Social Media

*The promise of cloud computing, especially as it relates to social media, is considerable*

WHILE CLOUD COMPUTING IS A METAPHOR for the Internet, its breadth and range are much more significant and ground-breaking. Cloud computing is a complex infrastructure of software, hardware, processing, and storage that is available as a service. Cloud computing offers immediate access to large numbers of the world's most sophisticated supercomputers and their corresponding processing power, interconnected at various locations around the world, proffering speed in the tens of trillions computations per second.



All of this is available through a simple Internet connection using a standard browser. Services range from the sublime—financial analysis, medical information and diagnoses, and document creation and collaboration—to the whimsical—computer gaming. Cloud computing is comprised essentially of applications running remotely (in the clouds, so to speak) that typically reside on personal computers and local servers.

**A little background.** The term 'cloud' first referred mainly to large ATM networks. Cloud computing began in earnest less than eight years ago with the advent of Amazon's web-based services. Within the last two years, Yahoo and Google announced plans to provide cloud computing services to some of this country's largest universities: Carnegie Mellon, University of Washington, Stanford, and MIT. IBM, followed immediately by Microsoft, quickly announced plans to offer cloud computing technologies.

More recent entries include Sun, Intel, Oracle, SAS, and Adobe. All of these companies invested mightily in cloud computing and infrastructure to provide vendor-based cloud services to the masses.

**Cloud services.** Much has been made of the potential multitude of services that cloud computing can and could offer. In essence, though, these services break out into three main areas: storage, processing, and software as a service (or SaaS).

◆ **Storage.** The storage capacity available through the cloud is simply enormous, seemingly endless, and growing every day. Instead of owning and maintaining your own computer storage, vendors offer you the choice of storing your information in the cloud, on their servers, accessible whenever you want.

◆ **Processing.** Supercomputers, with the world's fastest processors, form the basis of virtually all cloud computing sites. First, these supercomputers must handle the huge storage requirements. More importantly, however, they offer the kind of processing power that few companies can afford yet many critically need.

◆ **Software as a Service (SaaS).** For users, SaaS offers the greatest appeal. SaaS delivers benefits that are simply not available from applications running locally on your own computer. With cloud computing, you potentially have access to applications that you could never own. And a burgeoning number of SaaS applications enable you to create and collaborate on projects with people scattered around the globe simply by basing your information (think documents and proprietary data) in the cloud where everyone can access it.

**A fundamental change in the nature of software.** SaaS alters the basic premise of software. Think of the complex applications that you use every day: Word, FrameMaker, InDesign, Photoshop, RoboHelp, PowerPoint, and Flare. Each offers an incredible array of features, with its requisite learning curve. And how many

of these features do you actually use, or in some cases, even know about?

SaaS applications will not be delivered as one huge chunk of code, but rather as a set of individual services. This method of building applications allows you to use the features you need, as you need them, without your having to understand all the available features first.

Take, for instance, Google Maps, essentially a map of the world. Individual services attached to Google Maps include locating real estate for sale, rent, or lease; hotels and other accommodations; restaurants and other eateries; and points of interest such as museums and historical sites. Add to this the services of driving directions, urban planning, land management, and scoping out street level views of many cities, and you've got a robust set of applications that are accessible, informative, and interesting.

**Social media channels.** Cloud computing drives the many social media sites that you access virtually every day. When you realize that you have been using cloud computing every day to send messages, store photographs, upload videos, and a myriad of other tasks, the promise of cloud computing brightens considerably. When you upload a video to YouTube, that video is stored in the clouds; when you store your photographs on Flickr or post them to your Facebook page, those photos are stored in the clouds; when you collaborate on a project through LinkedIn, all of your information is stored in the clouds. And being in the clouds means that anyone with an Internet connection and appropriate privilege can access this information—which is exactly what you want. 🌐

—RICH MAGGIANI

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