

How can... the cloud improve collaboration and make my business more efficient?



COLLABORATION WITH others inside and outside a company is essential for any medium-sized business, but many people find it hard to work with external suppliers as if they were part of the same organisation. They collaborate laboriously by email or telephone, but often find themselves in a different place to partners and customers.

Online collaboration tools—or collaborating in the cloud—can ease these fears, as business translation firm AA Translations discovered when it upgraded to a Web-based system this year.

The company works with 700 translators, project managers and salespeople operating remotely worldwide. They translate corporate literature and creative text for clients in key markets, including the UK, Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Managing director **Jeremy Clutton**, above, says: "The process is complex and hugely collaborative. Prior to moving to the cloud, it involved transferring heavy desktop publishing files from the translator to the proofreader, then to the customer reviewer, to be annotated and then returned by email. The process was slow and resulted in several versions of the original that were collated in-house."

The cloud has streamlined the work; instead of dealing with multiple versions, there is one central, Web-hosted file that everyone involved sees. It has also saved on costs; instead of paying for multiple software licences, the company needs one.

Clutton wants to explore other cloud opportunities. Especially, he would like to create a dynamic workflow for specific projects. Can he gain further efficiencies? We ask three experts...



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

John McGuire, chief executive, FreshTL

Implementing a graphical workflow solution will help improve your business efficiencies, but there are other cloud-based solutions that could derive even greater benefits. As well as your core processes, you could think about moving some of your accounting operations to the cloud, where a number of Web solutions are now available.

Using a cloud-based compliance and regulatory solution such as TeamPoint could ease the red-tape burden that continues to be imposed on businesses by government and industry bodies, costing them time and money.

This will allow you to manage ever-increasing regulation more efficiently by collaborating online to write, review, and publish policies and procedures. The application also provides version control for policies so that you and your team members are always seeing the latest authorised version. It can record an audit trail of policies, too.

Christopher Barnatt, Nottingham University Business School



To stay competitive and boost your efficiency, you could use online Software as a Service (SaaS) applications to administer business activities, including online invoices, project management and HR.

Cloud software developments allow companies to provide services in new ways. The online presentation application, SlideRocket, features an integrated marketplace where users can buy services such as graphic design, copy editing and translation. Providing specialist services online within the cloud will help you to protect and develop your business.

By shifting from in-house IT to cloud computing, your firm will also become "greener". Servers in cloud data centres run more efficiently than those in most companies, and employees can run applications on energy-efficient computers.

Nick Barker, chief executive, Aware Monitoring

Applications in the cloud are bringing many business advantages, and with the growth in services there are now an increasing number of providers from which to choose.

But when you outsource your core processes to the cloud, it is vital to pick a provider carefully. You must be able to evaluate the supplier's capabilities for the service you are requesting, and you should try out the provider with a small, low-impact project; in other words, dip your toe into the water first.

Once the project is fully operational, you should monitor the experiences of users from an independent viewpoint to be sure the provider continues to deliver.



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