

SR•30 YOUR FIRM IN THE CLOUD

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Kluwer

Next step: The cloud

Every firm needs to make their own roadmap

By Antoinette Alexander

In today's evolving business climate, some accounting professionals may feel like they're on a high-speed train that demands greater efficiencies, enhanced mobility and new growth opportunities. For a growing number of these professionals, their journey toward a competitive advantage is fast approaching its next stop: the cloud.

"Cloud is only getting more and more popular," said Chris Dobkins, president and CEO of Njevity, a Microsoft Certified Partner and provider of cloud-based business applications. "Our belief is that within this generation we will move entirely away from on-premise deployments — not necessarily 100 percent because there will always be some companies that, for one reason or another, need to have their systems on-premises, but we

As noted by Christina Wiseman, product manager of centralized services and transitions for Thomson Reuters, the benefits of migrating to a cloud-based solution are wide-ranging:

- ▶ Time savings: You're not responsible for data backups (and testing), installing/updating software, troubleshooting.
- ▶ Scalability: You can quickly onboard new staff, since localized setup is not a factor.
- ▶ Competitive advantage: You can better serve your clients the way they want to be served, and offer the tools and mobility that current and potential staff expect.
- ▶ Reach Millennials: Providing mobile tools via the cloud allows firms to be more attractive to Millennials.

'WHY ARE YOU MAKING THE MOVE TO THE CLOUD? BECAUSE THAT IS GOING TO HELP YOU, KNOWING...YOUR PURPOSE.'

think a vast majority of the market will be moving to the cloud. This idea of having a server in your office and having server rooms in your office will be extremely rare in the SMB space."

Herman Man, global vice president of product/ engineering for Xero, a provider of online accounting software for small businesses, said, "We just think that [the cloud] is a real game-changer in terms of having businesses grow more rapidly and to really help position firms into more of a value-based pricing model where they're closer to the clients and they can provide that data and that insight."

Research confirms that the use of cloud services among CPA firms is on the rise. The 2016 National Management of an Accounting Practice Survey from the American Institute of CPAs' Private Companies Practice Section and CPA.com found that some 56 percent of all firms surveyed said that they use cloud-based software, up 17 percentage points from 2014. The use of cloud-based remote backup increased 14 percentage points to 57 percent for all firms, and an identical number reported that they capture source documents digitally.

▶ Peace of mind: Cloud vendors have a vested interest in investing the time, money and expertise in securing their solutions, in ways that most firms can't do in-house.

GETTING STARTED

Selection and implementation of the appropriate software is obviously important, but many sources advise firms to take a measured, phased-in approach that begins with first identifying their needs and goals.

"Firms should take a step back to understand what problems they're actually looking to solve within their business," said Will Yapp, vice president of sales, marketing and business development for Right Networks, a provider of personalized cloud solutions for accountants and small and midsized businesses. "Is spending less time on IT and infrastructure and more time on growing their customer base going to be most impactful? Is there a need for better collaboration with clients? Depending on what you're trying to solve, when you think about moving to the cloud, you start with the areas that are

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Spotlighton

Why should accounting firms and other organizations consider moving themselves to the cloud?

The cloud provides certain undisputable benefits that are either not possible with traditional software or much more difficult. We're hearing



Heffy Provost
Executive vice president
and general manager
Wolters Kluwer Tax and
Accounting

from more and more firms that are struggling to keep up with the level of competitiveness in the profession right now. Clients have never been more demanding, and staff continue to be hard to find and keep. Being in the cloud helps firms be more responsive to clients while making the firm a more attractive place to work. With cloud-based solutions, firms can offer clients selfservice tools and provide staff with remote work opportunities.

How are you helping organizations make that move?

We've invested heavily

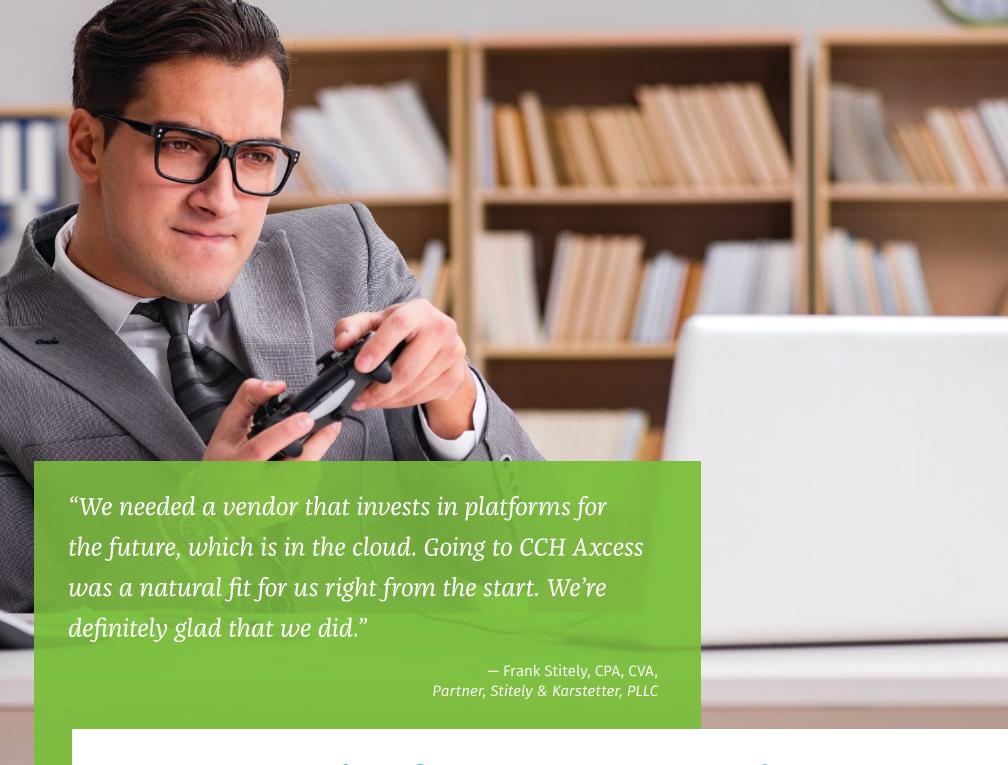
in our cloud solutions. While our competitors spent a lot of time and money trying to move their solutions to the cloud through virtualization, we designed our cloud software from the ground up to take advantage of the cloud's unique benefits. Now, those other vendors are playing catch up because their old software doesn't hold up to today's standards. Our CCH Axcess products continue to be the only modular, cloud-based tax preparation, compliance and workflow solutions available to firms. Our central client database and open integration platform make it

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relatively easy to connect other cloud solutions to CCH Axcess.

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going to provide you with better efficiencies in running your business."

Echoing the sentiment, Wiseman said that firms should first clarify their scope and needs. "Why are you doing this? Why are you making the move to the cloud? Because that is going to help you ... knowing exactly what is your purpose and what is your goal," she said.

While there's no cookie-cutter approach to moving to the cloud, some sources suggest walking before running and mapping out which services and solutions can be simultaneously moved.

Yapp said that he recommends, especially for established firms, taking a phased-in approach and migrating adjunct services, such as payroll and invoicing, together into the cloud. In a separate phase, firms may then migrate more infrastructure-related areas like their phone system. "When firms are moving to the cloud, they should identify a few of the core areas that will allow them to grow their business and gain efficiencies. Then focus on the applications associated with those areas. Move the ones that are related into the cloud together, versus trying to bring misaligned functions to the cloud at that same time," he said.

do the legwork and figure out what is going to work for [the firm]."

NAVIGATING SOFTWARE SELECTION

With a goal, a plan and a champion in place, firms must then determine which software will best meet their needs. For some firms, a good place to start is to look at the software they are currently using to determine if that vendor has a cloud option they can leverage.

"Do you operate in one vendor's software (plus MS Office) and are you able to take advantage of their cloud options? If you're a mixed suite, should you re-evaluate the efficiencies of having a mixed suite and potentially change, or do you need to look at a third-party hosting solution? Now is a great time to evaluate your workflow and make improvements," Wiseman said.

Njevity's Dobkins agreed, and said that for current, on-premise Dynamics GP customers there are several cloud options available. "If the customer is already on Dynamics GP, for example, there are some really great cloud options available to existing GP customers directly in our community. PowerGP Online, or our NjevityToGo solution, allows the customers to move to the cloud relatively easily without ... the friction of moving to a new product," he said. NjevityToGo is aimed at those seeking a hosting solution for Dynamics GP and targets

'THE REALITY IS THAT WE LIVE IN A MULTI-CLOUD WORLD... HOW ARE ALL THESE PRODUCTS GOING TO PLAY TOGETHER?'

"If you haven't done anything in this space, a good place to start is to start looking at some of the peripheral workloads like e-mail," suggested Jon Roskill, chief executive officer of Acumatica, a provider of cloud-based business management software for small and midsized companies. "One of the products that we've seen very strong adoption of in the past few years has been Office 365 from Microsoft. It is a very logical workload to get out of running yourself. ... Once you've done that, then maybe the next workload is something like human resources or customer relationship management."

Jay Kimelman, a specialist Xero accountant and founder and chief accounting technologist of Orlando, Fla.-based The Digital CPA, has been operating his firm in the cloud since 2012. With five years of experience under his belt, Kimelman suggests that those firms looking to sever ties with their desktop software take "baby steps" and, perhaps most important, appoint a champion. "First thing they need to do is find somebody internally that understands the cloud and understands the technologies and make them their champion," he advised. "They need somebody to champion the efforts internally. Have them

those with more complex needs and those who prefer a white-labeled option. Launched within the last four months, the new PowerGP Online is built on Microsoft Dynamics GP 2016 and powered by the Microsoft Cloud, and has been specially configured to give customers a true SaaS offering for Dynamics GP.

Meanwhile, Right Networks' QuickBooks cloud hosting solution enables professionals to gain virtual access to their current on-premise software. Right Networks currently has more than 100,000 QuickBooks desktop users, and hosts hundreds of business applications including Microsoft Office 365, tax software, payroll and invoicing. "The fact that accountants don't have to switch out their existing software and they can use QuickBooks desktop software in a cloud-based environment, plus gain all of the benefits of the cloud, is a huge advantage. They don't have to change their existing workflows and processes and can continue to use the software that they know and love," Yapp said.

Firms also need to consider whether a private or public cloud deployment best meets their needs. "There's

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Spotlighton

Why should accounting firms and other organizations consider moving themselves to the cloud?

Cloud-based solutions can help accountants perform client engagements faster, but that's only one benefit. The real potential lies in actually creating new

growth opportunities for accountants.

Accountants

World



Dr. Chandra Bhansali Co-founder and CEO AccountantsWorld

First, true cloud solutions help firms offer existing services more profitably, such as write-up. Next, firms can level the playing field for services they may have considered too risky or low-margin, including payroll processing. Finally and most importantly, the cloud opens the door to profitably offering new services that clients highly value, especially strategic advisory services. Best of all, by performing existing services more efficiently, accountants free up time to deliver additional value to existing clients.

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a set of customers that have requirements like they can't have data in the public Internet or they have to be able to verify which country the data is being stored in, particularly with things like government accounts and nonprofits. A private cloud solution can be a great way to go," said Roskill, "Acumatica offers the ability to actually move back and forth, if needed, between [private and public cloud]."

Acumatica solutions can be deployed in-house or in a private or public cloud. Roskill said that the majority of Acumatica's users, about 80 percent, opt for the vendor's SaaS offering.

The SaaS model is an annual subscription license for Acumatica hosted in a public cloud, such as Amazon Web Services. Users pay a set monthly fee, and the IT infrastructure, plus upgrades, are handled by Acumatica. According to the vendor, this "outsourcing" option has become the fastest growing licensing option.

Regardless of the solutions a firm selects, there's one very important factor to consider — interoperability. "A few years ago, people were thinking about the cloud like it was all one big cloud. The reality is that we live in what

brings many benefits, but also requires firms to rethink their processes, procedures and workflow goals. These all should be addressed as part of the strategy and plan a firm should develop before migrating their process to the cloud," said Satyan Penmetsa, chief technology officer for Wolters Kluwer Tax & Accounting North America.

Wolters Kluwer has been working to expand the cloud-based tax and accounting solutions that firms can use to communicate and collaborate with their clients, and has built a portfolio of practice-management solutions across its market segments, including cloud-based CCH iFirm and CCH Axcess.

Wiseman of Thomson Reuters agreed and said, "Now is the time to evaluate your workflow. Unless you're a sole proprietor who doesn't hire any additional help during busy seasons, it's likely that the actual day-to-day process differs from how you believe it does or should. Conduct 'safe zone' meetings where your staff can speak candidly about what really happens from the original engagement letter or call, to the finished product, to follow-up questions. Don't 'correct' them if they tell you a process you believe to be wrong."

Added Wiseman, "Now that you've identified areas in your workflow that can be improved, incorporate those improvements into your move to the cloud. By

'IT IS HAPPENING RIGHT NOW, AND IF YOU DON'T JUMP ONBOARD, YOU'RE GOING TO GET LEFT BEHIND.'

I call a multi-cloud world. There are many clouds. There's a Microsoft cloud; there's a Salesforce cloud; there's a Magento cloud; there's an Acumatica cloud," said Roskill. "So, the critical thing that businesses need to be thinking through in the transition to the cloud is how are all of these cloud products going to play together? There has to be a level of interoperability."

He added, "It is very important, as you think about the accounting system and the ERP system as that central system of record, to make sure that it has modern interfaces and integration capability to be able to integrate with all of these other cloud apps."

SPRING-CLEAN YOUR WORKFLOW

Changing solutions is an ideal time for firms to review their workflows and identify areas that can be improved upon. In fact, those firms that carefully evaluate their workflow before jumping into the cloud stand to reap the most benefits of a cloud-based solution.

"The most frequent challenge many firms face when adopting new cloud solutions is assuming that their workflows will replicate those that existed in their previous on-premise environments. The move to the cloud having clear benefits based on the pain points your staff already know and recognize, you not only improve your efficiencies, but you help your staff overcome fear of change, as they see clear benefits."

Chandra Bhansali, CEO of AccountantsWorld, a provider of cloud-based solutions for accountants, said that firms migrating to the cloud should be prepared for change — for the better. "In general, with this cloud technology, there is a change in workflow but the workflow change is actually very inviting. It is very easy to implement, while the benefits are tremendous," he said.

George Magas, owner of George S. Magas CPA PC in Damascus, Md., is reaping the benefits of enhanced workflow since moving to the cloud. "When I mapped it out with [AccountantsWorld's Payroll Relief] I saw three or four, maybe five, processes that I could eliminate. To me that was a no-brainer not to go to them and process payroll. ... All of those little processes that we used to do before are now handled by Payroll Relief. It streamlined payroll so much for us and made us so much more efficient," he said.

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Spotlighton

Why should accounting firms and other organizations consider moving themselves to the cloud?

▶ Anywhere, anytime access to information by staff, customers and partners, since all applications are designed

to run on mobile devices.

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Acumatica

- No staff time required to maintain or upgrade hardware as the company grows.
- The most current functionality is always available since the cloud vendor maintains and updates the software.
- The SaaS cloud vendor has the best security available, as verified by multiple news stories on the data security breaches occurring at on-premises systems.
- Data is safely backed up with a disaster recovery plan and capabilities.
- True cloud applications are designed with an

intuitive user interface to speed time to productivity.

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Acumatica ERP delivers adaptable cloud and mobile technology with a unique all-inclusive user licensing model, enabling a complete, real-time view of your business anytime, anywhere. Through our worldwide network of partners, Acumatica provides the full suite of integrated business management applications, including Financials, Distribution, Manufacturing, Project Accounting and CRM. There is only one true cloud ERP platform designed for midsized customers — Acumatica.





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- High value: unlimited users with no increased expense

There is only one true Cloud ERP platform designed for mid-sized customers –Acumatica

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He said that the firm also uses Accounting Power, which can populate check images and bank statements into the monthly write-up work — a feature that is proving to be especially beneficial.

"It has made our whole firm more organized, plus more profitable and more efficient," Magas said.

CLOUD = OPPORTUNITY

As noted earlier, the benefits of the cloud are wideranging. For a growing number of firms, the cloud is also unlocking an array of new service offerings.

"The cloud is truly changing how firms can provide historical compliance services," said CPA.com president and CEO Erik Asgeirsson. "At the same time, it's transforming how firms can deliver outsourced client accounting, one of the highest growth areas today."

Jackie Meyer, Intuit user and president of Southlake, Texas-based Meyer Tax Consulting, has operated in the cloud since the firm was founded in 2010. Seeing an opportunity to further serve both current and prospective high-net-worth clients, she transitioned, in fall 2016, about half of her clients to a nearby CPA firm so she could focus on a new service offering — a concierge CPA practice for executives.

"We're offering all-inclusive monthly packages to clients to really focus and dive in on tax planning strategies and managing those strategies for the client," said Meyer, who noted that she's seen a 35 percent boost in revenue by converting current high-net-worth clients to the new structure.

Thanks to greater efficiencies and access to real-time data, Salem, Ind.-based Steven Brewer & Co. CPAs has moved from being reactive to proactive when serving clients and is able to take on a greater advisory role, said firm president Steven Brewer.

"It has allowed us to move into a much better business advisor/CFO role with a lot of our clients from here on out. It has really opened up that avenue. ... We are more responsive because we are getting the information from the client quicker. If we are doing the write-up, we are able to pull bank statements and everything more timely. We are not waiting on the client to bring it in. We are getting financial statements out quicker and we are getting it out more efficient, and we are able to have a meeting more often with them," said Brewer, whose firm leverages AccountantsWorld's Accounting Power and Payroll Relief.

James Management Group in Frisco, Texas, has provided outsourced services for many of its clients for years, but as the firm evolved, the need for greater access to client data became increasingly evident.

Looking to leverage technology and better service its clients, the firm has been taking steps to migrate to the cloud since 2013, leveraging hosted server environments and exploring cloud-based applications like Quickbooks Online and Bill.com. For the 2015 tax season, it moved from Intuit's ProSeries desktop solution to ProConnect Tax Online, said Chris James, general counsel for the firm.

"Today, we can see everything as it is happening

because everything is flowing into our books. So, we are able to, on the spot, generate a financial report for a client if they are looking to acquire a new business, a new location. We can model and we can really slice and dice the information and provide forecasts and things of that nature for our clients to allow them to make better business decisions," James said.

Andrea Parness, QuickBooks Online user and owner of A. Parness Co. CPA in Belle Harbor, N.Y., said the cloud has enabled her to bring added value and expanded advisory services to business clients.

"It has been really wonderful. I would say we are less concerned with entering data and more concerned with evaluating results and affecting results and helping our clients meet goals," Parness said.

Intuit product specialist Anthony Hunt noted, "[Accountants] will be able to change their workflow and look into really becoming a trusted advisor because they will have access to that client's file year-round. They are going to be able to see what their client is doing and be able to offer consultative services to help that small business excel and grow moving forward."

Intacct customer and Top 100 Firm SC&H Group recently developed an outsourced accounting practice. Fully launched in fourth quarter 2016, the division currently serves about a dozen clients in the cloud.

"We sat down, as we do on a regular basis, with members of the AICPA and CPA.com in looking at our service offerings and where we think we might have a growth opportunity, and one of the things that came out in 2015 was really doing an outsourced accounting practice utilizing cloud-based software," said Michael Lynch, principal of the Sparks, Md.-based firm. "We took it to heart and moved forward with a business plan and vetting the software."

Meanwhile, Troy, Mich.-based Top 100 Firm Rehmann recently partnered with Intacct to expand its outsourced accounting and advisory practice, which includes SkyBooks, the firm's cloud-based suite of financial and accounting software solutions. As an Intacct value-added reseller, the firm can sell, implement, support and develop custom enhancements for Intacct's cloud financial applications.

"We budgeted conservatively to growth at 50 percent a year. We just see opportunities every day. Literally every day we are getting phone calls from people who are ready to make the change [to the cloud]. ... More and more businesses are really embracing the concept of the cloud financial packages," said Sharon Berman, Southeast Region principal in accounting, consulting and tax, referring to SkyBooks. SkyBooks launched in 2014.

"If you don't [move to the cloud], I guarantee that your competition is. It is not something that is going to happen, it is happening right now and if you don't jump onboard, you're going to be left behind," advised Kevin Cumley, director of the Accountants Program for Intacct, a provider of cloud-based ERP software. "You have to make sure that you do your homework on the front end, as well as, once you make the decision to get into whatever cloud solution it is, fully commit. Get all the proper training, whatever that might be, and dedicate the right resources to make it a success for your firm." AT

Spotlighton

Why should accounting firms and other organizations consider moving themselves to the cloud?

Business is moving to the cloud, so it's wise for accounting firms to lead their clients there. Cloud technology



Erik Asgeirsson President and CEO CPA.com

makes data more useful in day-to-day decision-making, and it creates more opportunities for collaboration with clients. For CPAs, that means you can fulfill your role as trusted business advisor in a more immediate, demonstrable way.

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How are you helping organizations make that move?

CPA.com offers a host of online resources, webcasts and workshops to help practitioners make the most of the cloud and other emerging technologies. We strive to promote a sense of community among

forward-looking firms, most notably through our signature Digital CPA conference. We also have relationships with best-in-class service providers that are using the cloud to improve both productivity and capabilities for firms and their clients.

CPA.com offers a growing list of products and services for practice management, client advisory services and professional development. The company has established itself as a thought leader on cloud technology and has been a driving force around the re-emergence of virtual CFO/controller services by firms.

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The cloud evolves

3 ongoing changes you need to know about

By Tom Andrulis

Most accountants are aware of the potential benefits of using the cloud. In fact, the most ardent advocates are accounting software providers. Just like clouds in the physical world, the technology cloud is dynamic and evolving. This constant change raises the question: How can your accounting firm benefit from it?

1. The cloud is becoming an important reputation indicator. Today, consumers expect access to their business processes and data from anywhere as long as there is an Internet connection. With greater access comes higher expectations, and accountants cannot sit in a client's boardroom without instant access to all relevant information, unable to perform ad hoc calculations and projections.

accounting tools in addition to customer relationship management, a cloud-based e-mail client, a cloud-based project management tool, etc.

The increasing complexity of cloud solutions presents a new risk for organizations — the loss of time and financial and resource savings. In some situations, it may end up costing more to operate a cloud solution than to use on-premise tools. The cloud industry is moving quickly to address these problems through the creation of new tools, such as cloud analytics tools to monitor your consumption of cloud resources. Understanding how these tools can benefit your business will help you get a maximum return on your cloud investment while also staying ahead of your competition.

THE CLOUD IS BECOMING A REPUTATION INDICATOR.'

After big companies began to migrate their infrastructure to the cloud, overly cautious organizations that once chose private computer networks are now starting to recognize the benefits of this technology. Today, small and midsized enterprises are following suit. The migration is not limited to data storage, and with cloud computing, some are deploying business processes.

On the other side, accounting firms can expect even more demanding clients who want immediate access to their balance sheets and tax-related documents. Accountants can take these expectations as an opportunity to increase their level of service, and to go after the kinds of audiences and clients that value immediate access to data and services.

2. An increasing trend toward the use of tools to make the cloud more efficient. In theory, moving business processes and IT infrastructure to the cloud saves you time, money and resources. Very few organizations, however, have the luxury of creating a cloud solution from scratch. Instead, it evolves organically and typically includes multiple services and vendors. For example, you might run multiple

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These tools help you control costs and ensure you only pay for what you really need. For example, are you paying for full-scale, seven-day-a-week access, when the vast majority of your business is conducted during business hours Monday through Friday? Analytics tools give you the information you need to see exactly how your team is using the cloud and where additional efficiency savings can be made.

Another service you might begin to see more often (if you don't use it already) is cloud management services. Providers of these services are specifically concerned with ensuring that the various aspects of your IT (both cloud and on-premises) are properly configured, integrated and managed. This includes integration management, incident management, technical support, disaster recovery, asset management and more.

3. Hybrid cloud models will become easier to implement. Cloud evangelists used to promote moving all business processes to the cloud. Thankfully, this is now heard a lot less than before. This is because most people recognize that hybrid cloud models (where some business processes happen in the cloud while others are kept on-premise) are a more realistic option in the modern world of business. In fact, you probably operate a hybrid cloud model right now. The change you are likely to see over the coming year or so is the increasing availability of tools to make the implementation and management of hybrid models easier to achieve. AT

Spotlighton

Why should accounting firms and other organizations consider moving themselves to the cloud?

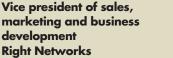
As the cloud continues to impact how we manage our daily lives, it is not surprising that it is affecting the way we manage our businesses, too. Just as the

> cloud has made it easier for you to share with friends and have information at your fingertips, it has provided the same benefits for accountants who need to manage their financial data and effectively run and grow their business. Top benefits include:

Right

Networks

1. Increase efficiencies. Spend less time on data entry, processing invoices and expense reports, and sharing files back and forth. Run your business on a cloud-based platform that seamlessly integrates all the applications you use and frees up your time.



Will Yapp

development

Right Networks



real-time access to the information and data you need at any time, from anywhere. Collaborate more effectively by working simultaneously in the same files and having financial data available when you need it.

3. Work smarter. Spend more time on the things that matter most to you. Focus on delivering value-added services to your customers and become even more strategic about running and growing your business.

How are you helping organizations make that move?

Right Networks offers the best of both worlds for accountants and small businesses. Our cloud-based platform allows you to use the accounting and accounting-related software you know while gaining all the benefits of the cloud without changing the way you work. We provide a way to move your tech out from under your desk so you can spend less time on managing your IT infrastructure. With our solution, you can collaborate more effectively with colleagues and clients and have financial data available for the people and applications that need it, whenever they need it, in a secure and safe environment.

Right Networks is the leading provider of cloud-hosted QuickBooks desktop software and 400+ other applications for accounting firms and small and midsized businesses. More than 100,000 users trust our solution to share and collaborate in the cloud and streamline their workflows and processes. Visit us at www.rightnetworks.com.





Right Networks is the leading provider of cloud-based QuickBooks desktop software

Right Networks offers the best of both worlds for accountants and small businesses. The Right Networks cloud allows you to use the accounting software you know while gaining all the benefits of the cloud.

- > Collaborate with your clients and accountants more effectively
- > Share your financial data easily with the applications and people that need it
- Spend more time growing your business and less time on your IT
- > Gain the comfort of knowing your data is secure and support is always there 24x7