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KPMG, the accounting giant, recently took the pulse of the market and learned that hearts apparently aren't skipping a beat for cloud migration. The overriding emotion in *The Cloud Takes Shape*, the new KPMG survey, is ambivalence.

Among the sample — 650 companies and IT professionals in some 16 global markets — the cloud is, in a sense, a done deal. No surprise there: Forrester Research says the total hosted software market will reach \$75 billion by 2014. Per KPMG, more than 50 percent are already hooked on the cloud, but 30+ percent are experiencing sticker shock and a similar percentage are having issues getting the darn thing to work.

Citing important cloud-inspired strategic benefits like process improvement, operational flexibility and improved time to market, KPMG's Rick Wright lamented the fact that too many organizations are enamored of — or, conversely, soured by — technology and thereby miss the fundamental business goals that cloud migration can advance.

In my view, Wright could not be more right. Businesses smitten by technology — by the novelty of moving IT to a new neighborhood, mostly because it's new and different — are looking through the wrong end of the telescope, and that applies to accounting firms as much as to any organization. In fact, there is nothing faddish about cloud migration, but it's essential that accounting firms make the move for the right reasons, lest they wake up one morning disgruntled and disillusioned.

And it's not just a matter of the rationale to virtualize, to embrace the Infrastructure

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in the cloud. In one smart move, small and midsize businesses (and the accounting firms that love them) can gain the kind of IT infrastructure support that was formerly reserved only for the enterprise. Better still, streaming QuickBooks to the desktop via cloud hosting can bypass the aggravation and angst that KPMG's Rick Wright found so prevalent in the firm's recent survey.

Consider Intuit's rigorous criteria for QuickBooks hosting – a sort of insurance policy for any accounting firm or client. Hosting providers are evaluated on their ability to provide superior application hosting platforms, including best-in-class security, customer support, uptime and reliability, and licensing compliance management. That in itself is a tremendous advantage for accounting firms and small businesses alike, enabling them to access QuickBooks as part of a virtual office environment.

With hosted QuickBooks, accounting firms have the dual advantages of industry-leading software backed by security and application-consistent backup systems that provide ultimate data protection. Your clients – or your own organization – can stream QuickBooks Pro, QuickBooks Premier or QuickBooks Accountant directly to the desktop. Through the cloud, clients can share QuickBooks data files with other users anywhere in the world.

Accounting firms can choose a shared farm of terminal servers or a dedicated server, which gives them the advantage of installing any app they want. Clients have the option of purchasing any number of QuickBooks packages and paying the provider to host the software. Alternatively, clients can license QuickBooks Pro, Premium or Accountant Edition from the provider on a monthly basis.

Still, old myths die hard, and even with Intuit's intensive vetting of QuickBooks hosts, some may still raise an eyebrow at the prospect of populating the cloud with highly sensitive financial data. To me, that's a clarion call to the industry to have a

conversation about why data and apps are actually *more* secure in the cloud than on

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level, application level protection, hardware firewall, IP-restricted FTP, managed backups with 14-day retention, advanced monitoring and multi-level intrusion prevention.

Suddenly, with that kind of regimen to follow, things should look a bit clearer (dare I say “less cloudy”?). All the consternation about this seemingly ephemeral thing called the cloud needs to melt away – and with it, any hesitation accounting firms may have about it. So don't sweat the technology. It hearts your business.

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