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Trey James • Dec. 30, 2013

As more and more firms consider moving to the cloud, the various flavors of cloud become a focal point of their diligence. We get a fair amount of questions about IaaS, (a.k.a. Infrastructure as a Service) and what specifically sets it apart from the other options available today. See [Wikipedia's definition of Cloud](#) for more insight.

What is IaaS?

IaaS is exactly what its name suggests. If a company needs networking components (storage, power, compute/processor, servers, etc.), an IaaS company will effectively rent you the needed components on an as needed basis while they manage the related equipment and technologies within their own datacenter.

Can a CPA firm use IaaS?

Sure, but here are a few guidelines for firms looking to move to an IaaS provider to keep in mind to see if it works for them:

- **Do I still need IT people?**

Yes, the firm must have internal IT resources/people to make this move, because, while you may be renting the infrastructure, you still need someone to scope and configure the technology components. Given the traditional CPA application requirements, you will need someone internally to manage and update those applications on a regular basis.

- **Will an IaaS provider give me access to the latest Operating Systems (OS)?**

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In an IaaS situation, the uptime guarantees do not necessarily mean everything will work perfectly 99.99% of the time as the uptime guarantee states. Why? Let's say you run an application update and it breaks a certain aspect on the server and it causes it to crash. In this case, the IaaS vendor is not at fault for this issue. What you are guaranteed in an IaaS environment typically has to do with the ability to have a server at your disposal with power, internet, and other related resources.

- **Does an IaaS vendor provide a help desk for the firm's end users?**

Typically, an IaaS vendor has options for a firm wanting a deeper level of service, however, most firms find it difficult to address the knowledge transfer required to bring (and keep) the vendor up to speed with your CPA-specific apps. Rarely do IaaS vendors provide the support for your workstations, printers, and other peripherals on your local network.

- **What is the delineation of where the IaaS vendor stops and my internal IT begins?**

Typically, the IaaS vendor "owns" management of the OS and related hardware. Anything beyond the OS, such as apps, user management, security, etc. is your responsibility, unless you've negotiated a higher level of support. The IaaS company is ensuring you have connectivity to the server, storage is working properly, and you have other resources available to you, should you need them.

With all of this being said, make sure you do your research before selecting a provider of any kind. While there are some advantages to having an IaaS provider, many cloud providers offer the same, plus more. An IaaS provider does not replace an IT staff member for your firm, while a cloud provider can, depending on the provider's

services. CPA firms shouldn't have to spend their valuable time worrying about IT

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