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Randy Johnston • Nov. 08, 2015



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Software as a Service (SaaS) is making great progress. However, if you can't solve your business needs with all SaaS tools, and you want to live in the cloud, how do you do that? We've discussed in prior columns the advantages of private cloud and

public cloud approaches. What about hosting companies that specialize in the

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- Private cloud vs. public cloud
- Top performance vs. acceptable speed
- Reliability vs. intermittency
- Simplicity vs. complexity
- Software vendor provided vs. third party
- SaaS vs. the requirement of desktop software
- In-house talent vs. outsourced talent
- Outsourced talent vs. specialty knowledge of the profession
- One-time costs vs. recurring costs
- Ownership vs. lease
- Flexibility vs. being told by the vendor your options
- Single site vs. multi-site
- Software updates provided vs. time used by in-house personnel (possibly a partner)
- Seamless experience by end users vs. separate steps and tools to do tasks
- Single vendor solution vs. multiple vendors
- Entry level security vs. strong, monitored security
- Shared scanners vs. network scanners
- Virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) vs. remote desktop access (RDS)
- Convenient multiple monitor support vs. single window access
- Protection with subpoena vs. unknown access via Freedom Act PRISM order
- Retention policies vs. unknown copies
- Local control vs. questions about governance compliance
- Mitigating risk of single site disaster vs. promise of operating from data centers
- Choice vs. restricted options

Note that for each of the considerations listed above, and there may additional items from your perspective. Your preferences and situation may dictate your solution. In other cases, there will be no clear winner. You may get frustrated, and simply give up

by maintaining the status quo or conceding to use a cloud vendor to solve local

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much confusion in the market. There are dozens of right ways to solve the problem and hundreds of wrong ways that won't produce the result you want, possibly even when you spend more money and time.

The big options and providers by category for CPA firms look something like this:

- **Private Cloud**

- In house network hardware
- Remote access with RDS, Citrix, VDI
- Maintained reactively with in-house personnel and local support or proactively by in-house IT and a managed service provider
- Examples include: Network Management Group, Inc.
- Support pricing \$100-150/user/month

- **Hosted**

- You purchase and install your equipment in a co-location
- Installation and maintenance is done with your personnel or a contracted vendor, which may be the co-location personnel themselves
- Examples: NetStandard

- **Hosted with managed care**

- The vendor provides the servers and storage
- You may bring the licenses or pay licensing fees
- Examples include: CETROM, Cloud9 Real Time, Cloudvara, Infinitely Virtual, InSynq, NovelASpect, Xcentric
- Pricing \$34-300/user/month (yes, there is that much variance)

- **Hosted with primary focus on a specific application or family of applications**

- The vendor provides the servers and storage
- You may bring the licenses or pay licensing fees

- Examples include: Right Networks, Skyline (UniData), Qutera, other licensed

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- Examples include: Amazon, Microsoft Azure, RackSpace
- Pricing \$49-999/user/month

- **Vendor provided**

- The vendor provides the servers and storage
- The vendor provides the software, setup and support
- Examples: CCH Axcess, Thomson Virtual Office CS
- Pricing \$99-1999/user/month

- **SaaS**

- The vendor runs a multi-tenant, multi-user data center
- Access is through a web browser
- You select and license apps from multiple vendors to solve the business problem
- Examples: Intuit QuickBooks Online, Intuit Tax Online, Thomson GoFileRoom, Thomson GoSystem Tax RS

You'll find that our advice is similar to selecting an appropriate accounting software for your firm and clients. If you are a larger organization, you might get a better, less expensive solution with a Do It Yourself (DIY) approach to private cloud. If you are smaller, you're more likely to have success with a hosted or managed service provider. As further guidance, consider the CPA Practice Advisor Reader's choice awards at: www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12061061 (Listed under ASP/Hosted Solution Providers) or www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/12014681.

Is There A Conclusion?

One thing learned is that one size does not fit all. Another key point was that no one vendor solves every problem. Expertise and being clear about the offerings was obvious on some vendor's web sites, while others clearly wanted to get you on the phone to either understand your needs or to try to "sell you". It was also pretty clear

that some vendors were not clear about their own offerings and that many were

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