It's time for nonprofits to embrace the cloud

Cloud computing promises lower technology costs and greater efficiency and productivity. Yet many nonprofits have yet to move to the cloud, possibly because their staffs are smaller and their IT expertise is limited. Fortunately, cloud computing is a simple concept that's easy to adopt.

Remote control

Cloud computing, also known as "software as a service," uses a network of remote third-party servers made available online. Rather than relying on your organization's own computers or server, you remotely share software and storage to process, manage and share information.

For many nonprofits, the greatest advantage of using cloud services is lower costs. The technology generally eliminates pricey contracts and per-user licensing fees. Instead, cloud customers pay a monthly subscription fee or are billed based on actual usage. What's more, service providers update their offerings and provide security patches on an ongoing basis.

Another benefit is the scalability of cloud services. You can scale up when you need more storage or data capacity and scale back when you need less. Also, because cloud services aren't limited to a physical location and can be accessed from anywhere, they make it easy for colleagues, board members and volunteers to collaborate on projects. Finally, cloud services can make it easier to track and report funds over multiple time periods and to analyze budgets, expenses and cash flows. They can also produce specialized data reports.

Rest assured

Most reputable services boast stronger security, including firewalls, authorization restrictions and data encryption, than your own nonprofit could afford to put in place on its own. And cloud services typically offer continuous data backup and disaster recovery capabilities.

That said, your nonprofit can't possibly have as much control over a cloud system as it would of its own infrastructure. So if control is a priority, you need to weigh it against the benefits of cloud computing.

Vendor options

You'll want to look for a service that:

- Frequently updates features,
- Immediately responds to security threats,
- Protects the privacy of your data, and
- Backs up data in multiple locations.

Cost is another major consideration when selecting a vendor. But your nonprofit may qualify for discounts or even gratis services.

Get satisfaction

Before leaping into the cloud, be sure to research your options and get recommendations from other nonprofits and from IT experts. Contact us for help finding a cost-effective cloud provider.

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