Software

How to Beat a Cloud Skeptic

4 Steps Toward Rationalizing the Great Cloud Debate

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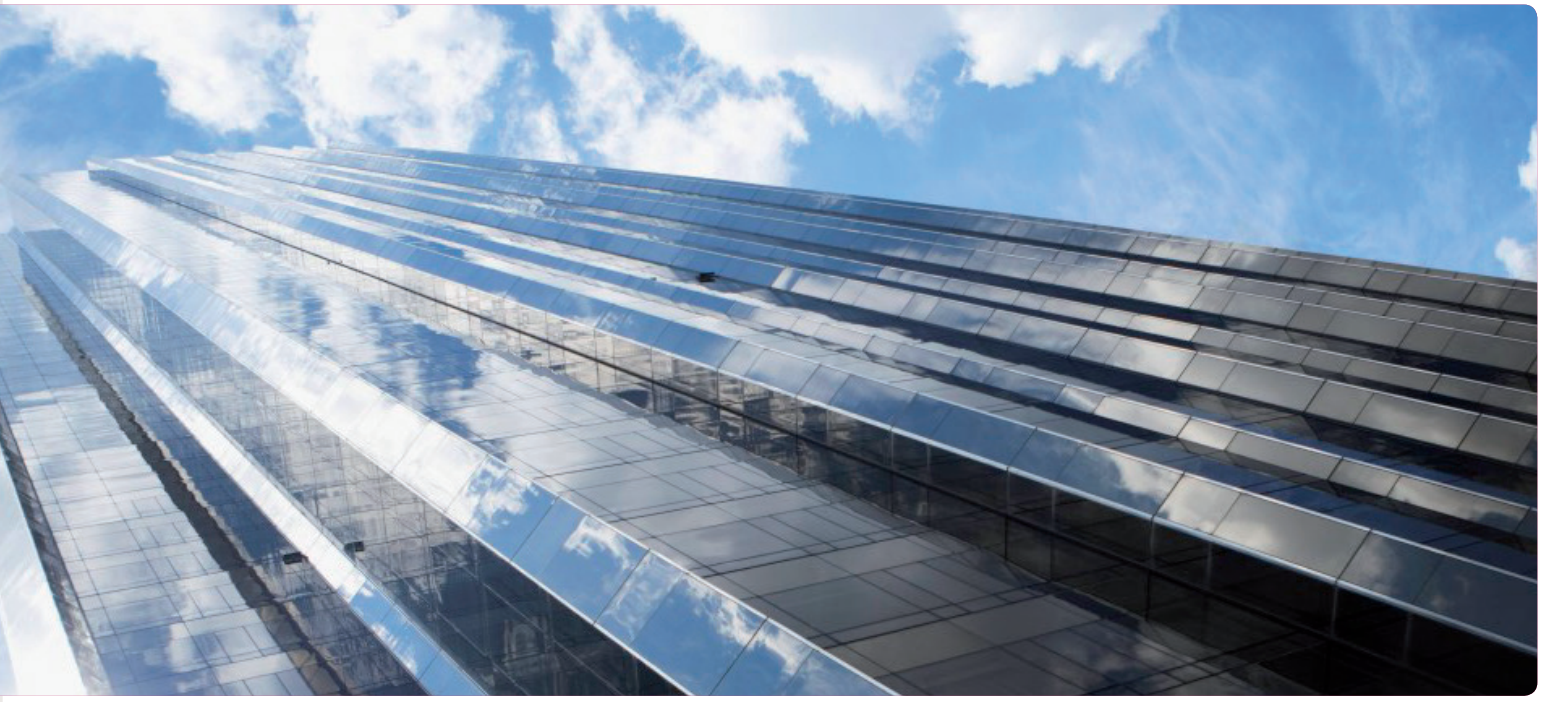

Abstract

IT professionals looking to embrace the cloud inevitably encounter skeptics who resist the move. This white paper details four key steps to dispelling the skeptic's fears so that your organization can begin to take advantage of the many benefits of the cloud.

The cloud will change everything.

It will alter forever the ways in which IT services are delivered. It will reimagine the landscape of what our industry can accomplish and redefine the practices in which those accomplishments are made available. It represents a wholesale shift to the entire mechanism of IT service delivery. Its mere presence requires re-asking and re-answering many of our industry's foundational questions long considered decided, and an evolution to the very activities we consider ours to perform.

Since the cloud is available equally everywhere, solving IT problems using a cloud-based approach represents a natural evolution driven by market forces. Simply put, the cloud and its services are the embodiment of economies of scale.

The cloud indeed means change. It is, in fact, the very embodiment of change for everything about our industry. And that recognition means some of us will lobby against it—many vehemently, many more idealistically.

Yet there's a common thread among all the arguments that have come to define the prototypical cloud skeptic: fear. Fear of the unknown, and even greater fear of change itself. Luckily, fear is an easy demon to dispel; all that's necessary is knowledge.

Here's how to beat the skeptics.

Step 1: Establish respect for why the cloud exists

At the core of the skeptic's argument lies ignorance about why this thing called the cloud exists in the first place. Those lobbying against the cloud ask, "Why change operating models when the one in use seems to be working?" A quick answer to this statement is, "Perhaps it not working well enough."

The cloud exists today because of market forces. It simply makes sense for it to exist, considering where IT sits in its lifecycle. Discard all the cloud's individual products and services and think for a moment about its mechanism of service delivery. Since the cloud is available equally everywhere, solving IT problems using a cloud-based approach represents a natural evolution driven by market forces. Simply put, the cloud and its services are the embodiment of *economies of scale.*

By definition, any solution enjoys increased efficiency as it scales upward, and solutions are enabled to scale upward when many people agree they need the same thing. This notion perfectly describes what our users need of us. As we've evolved past our early frontier days, the activities we're asked to accomplish are becoming uniform across virtually every organization. That growing consistency in the services demanded from IT automatically creates conditions ripe for someone to standardize, package, and sell them. Gather enough customers together, and the economies of scale enable an outside party to *sell them to you for a lower cost than doing it yourself.*

This is nothing new. You no longer grow your own livestock, and few of us build our own homes. We've learned that grocery stores and property developers accomplish the task far more efficiently. IT services are becoming little different.

Step 2: Assert the cloud's evolution to trust itself

With a solid foundation in the cloud's reason for being, your second step in beating the skeptic requires an agreement on trust itself. That agreement is simple: embracing the cloud means embracing a change to what we trust.

The cloud isn't a product; it's a service. Or, more importantly, it's an entire evolution to our industry's entire notion of trust—what we trust, whom we trust, and why we trust. Deciding to migrate a service onto someone else's infrastructure requires trusting that they'll do a good job. It also requires trusting that they're motivated by your continued business more than the content of your data.

Caution here is important. It isn't important at this point in the debate whether skeptics trust a service or not. They don't. Your job is merely to establish the recognition that the cloud *is a natural and to-be-expected evolution to trust itself.*

A metaphor works exceptionally well here, as it highlights how trust in other things has evolved over time. Walk through this scenario with your skeptic:

> Take out your wallet. Do you have a dollar bill? What is that dollar bill? It's a unit of purchase, right? If you possess that dollar, you possess a unit of purchase. Now

that dollar used to be backed by gold, specifically gold bars, and at one point it could be traded in for actual gold bars given enough dollars at the right location. What is it backed by now? The gold standard is gone, replaced by the full faith and credit of the United States government. You still use dollars as a purchasing tool, don't you? Isn't that an evolution to trust? Now take out a credit card. What really is this thing you're holding? It's a unit of purchase, similar in many ways to the dollar, but merely possessing it doesn't necessarily mean anything. If I take it from you, or the bank does, it becomes little more than a piece of plastic. In fact, do you even know where the dollars are that this credit card corresponds to? Likely not, but you trust that when you swipe it, you'll be able to get the groceries your family needs.

Trust in possession, in this case, has been replaced by trust in service delivery.

That metaphor perfectly describes the cloud's evolving notion of trust. The skeptic might not trust those services today, but an individual's trust absolutely evolves—even down to the ways in which we buy our groceries.

Step 3: Crystalize the cloud's definition

The goal for Step 1 is to get skeptics to recognize that the cloud is already all around them, and that its service delivery model isn't likely to go away. That recognition leads directly into the goal for Step 2, which is to get skeptics to admit that trust can evolve. Only after these initial notions are agreed upon does it become useful to start discussing specific examples.

It is in many ways unfortunate that the term cloud ever got coined. As a group, IT people are technologists at heart. The typical IT person lives in bits and bytes, ones and zeros, "this works" as opposed to "this isn't working today." Working in a binary universe automatically means that many IT professionals immediately distrust anything that isn't easily categorized. Notwithstanding what the cloud really is, for many it's that word they can't get past. To them the word cloud conjures something nebulous, amorphous, and impossible to point toward with absolute clarity.

We should have called it *services someone else owns.*

In fact, crystalizing the definition of cloud is perhaps better accomplished by deconstructing it into its three major subtypes. While others have hopped on the naming syntax, these three subtypes are the most universally accepted today. More importantly, they create natural breakpoints that are easier for the technologist to conceptualize:

- **Software as a Service (SaaS)** represents a delivery model where an outside vendor's software and your data within that software are hosted outside your data center.
- **Platform as a Service (PaaS)** represents an environment where your home-grown software and data can be hosted outside your data center. Whereas SaaS involves someone else's software, PaaS involves your own.
- **Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)** represents an environment where independently virtualized operating systems and their application stack can be hosted outside your data center. The dividing line between PaaS and IaaS is important. PaaS represents a software execution environment, whereas IaaS represents a virtual machine execution environment.

Important to recognize is that different businesses will have different needs across these (and other) cloud services. You're probably already using some of them, such as the cloud-based delivery of anti-malware signatures. Others might not make sense for you, such as a PaaS environment, if you're not in the business of software development.

Step 4: Deflate the instinctive response

A final step remains. This step is critical to combat the skeptic's understandable reaction to new information not yet fully assimilated. If you've done your job well,

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by this point you've locked your skeptic into a logic structure that's not easily escapable. The services are there. Others are using them. Others trust them. And the categories and delivery models available are beginning to crystalize.

Step 4 is perhaps the most difficult part. It requires overcoming objections that are deeply seated and strongly emotional in nature. The skeptic's visceral response most often traces down to one question they can't answer: "How will this change affect me?"

There's no security guarantee in the cloud. We don't have data ownership in cloud services. No accountability exists when a provider goes down, and no belly button to point at until services come back online. These and all the other roadblocks thrown up are easily adjudicated with a rational analysis of security solutions and protocols, contractual data protection guarantees, and the rationalization that a service gone down is still a service down—no matter if you're responsible or someone else is.

But a visceral response is best countered with a visceral response. Here's one I've used with great success: "Yes, the cloud will cause you to lose your job."
Now you may not necessarily lose your stream of income, and you might not lose your relationship with your employer. But the cloud's disruptive force will change what tasks and activities you perform every day as an IT practitioner.

In fact, it already has.

Conclusion

Beware of any individual or vendor who asserts you should move everything IT into the cloud. Rather, understand that the cloud exists as a viable option for offloading a range of IT services. Those that are easily contained, and those that are excessively expensive and/or time-consuming to perform yourself, make perfect candidates. Select a few low-hanging fruits to gain experience in the benefits cloud services can provide, as well as what risks and requirements cloud computing adds. Gain trust through slow but deliberate movements, shifting only those services that actually make sense. Release your fear, and find yourself happily embracing yet another option for hosting your users' IT services.

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