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Moving Outlook/Exchange to the Cloud

The most common IT related questions we receive these days concern strategies for businesses wishing to embrace cloud computing. Countless business owners have asked "Can't I just get rid of our servers and move everything to the cloud?" That invariably leads to a discourse on exactly what the "cloud" is, why it can be beneficial, but also the pitfalls and shortcomings of today's cloud computing capabilities.

To properly evaluate whether a given business should move a given application to the cloud, one really has to have a fairly solid grasp of all 7 layers of the OSI model. What does the application do? Who uses it and from where? How is the data structured and stored? Does the user interface require a low latency, fluid experience? Is the architecture design "thin?" How much bandwidth is required and how much is available? The questions can go on for some time.

Businesses need to have a strategy for their cloud migration that takes all of this into consideration on an application by application basis. But there is one application that is very widely used in business that is perfect for the cloud--Microsoft Exchange (the server component of Outlook).

Outlook, and e-mail in general, does not need a "low latency" high speed connection. If someone sends you an e-mail, you don't really care whether it is fully received in 10 seconds or a tenth of a second. What's more, Outlook (when properly configured) inherently is built to store data both on the server and in a synchronized location on your hard drive. This means that when you open an e-mail, or especially a large attachment, it is loaded from your local copy. As a result, having your server in an Internet attached remote location doesn't have much impact on the time it takes to receive or open an e-mail. Thus, Exchange hosted in the cloud does not impair your Outlook experience.

On the other hand, there are substantial benefits for hosted Exchange vs. doing it in-house. For most businesses, e-mail has become one of their most critical applications. Exchange can be deployed in a highly fault tolerant model, but it requires clustered servers with automated failover as well as redundant power and Internet connectivity. This is quite costly for a small or mid-sized business.

The data centers that cloud providers offer are huge in scale and so the cost of offering an IT environment that is suitable for mission critical applications is greatly reduced. Usually, data is replicated to provide geographical fault tolerance (in other words, if an F5 tornado takes out a data center, you are still up because your data is also somewhere else).

There are many cloud-based Exchange/Outlook providers to choose from. If you prefer to have an intermediary to take care of the "hands on" interaction of cloud-based computing, Infassure can provide that. As a Managed Cloud Provider, we work with the largest and most reputable cloud providers, and manage the details so you can focus on your business.