



By
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The momentum behind cloud computing has placed it at the forefront of any enterprise information technology discussion today, whether started by IT or by a non-IT professional. In today's insurance industry, both are likely given the confluence of IT consumerization and technology "abstraction." While shrinking form factors and improved ease-of-use (e.g. iPads) result in an increasingly technology-savvy workforce, the utility concept of cloud computing masks its complexity. Business users may be exposed more to technology in their personal lives than their predecessors, but the cloud makes

that "so what."

Cloud computing started as an alternative to

corporate IT's on-premise applications and infrastructure. Like the evolution of hardware (mainframe to PC), cloud is laying the foundation for mass customization to personal IT, or to a personal cloud.

IT industry analyst Gartner has stated the PC as we know it will no longer be relevant by 2014. What will remain relevant will be a business or personal user's ability to access what they need, when they need it. How all that occurs will no longer be worth dealing with; the personal cloud will simply become your virtual workspace.

An insurer's IT department has the opportunity to become the facilitator of this significant shift. Debating Bring-Your-Own-Device and whether this is a short-lived trend, one that is not secure enough, not compliant enough or not anything enough won't stop BYOD. Solutions to address this, such as cloud-based virtual desktops, are not new and are

already a generation ahead of current tech trends such as mobile device management. These same solutions inherently provide better security; after all, you can't steal a cloud.

On a monthly cost basis, cloud desktops—"desktop-as-a-service"—are now approaching that of traditional PCs. With DaaS support for BYOD offering more security, a comparison of implementing mobile device management before cloud desktops could be equated to equipping a horse-and-buggy with the newest safety equipment needed due to all the newfangled horseless carriages on the road.

Similarly, the concept of a desktop is quickly becoming obsolete. With the uptick of tablets and smartphones, the end-device of choice will no longer be a desktop or laptop; it could become the next-generation iPad, competitive tablet or a Motorola Atrix-like device. In this decade, having a virtual workspace with a single device will be the norm. The device, or simply the workspace, will be robust enough to pull together the set of applications required by a user "just in time," while also serving as their single communications device.

Virtual workspace is an intentionally broad term. End-users have become innovators. The processes of finding, downloading and updating applications are second nature to them. The cloud and its abundance of integration services are becoming the transparent glue tying together their virtual workspace.

It appears IT is getting the message. In a 2012 IT survey by analyst Simon Bramfitt, "over 63% of ... decision-makers [have] not yet reached a firm decision [on] future desktop strategy." Is that a bad thing? Not really, given that the same survey indicated that within three to five years, "conventional desktop... technologies [will] own less than 50% of the overall market." The virtual workspace is coming fast. Now is the time for IT to lead with innovation. **BR**

In the Clouds

Insight: Cloud computing is laying the foundation for mass customization of personal IT.

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