

You're pretty new to cloud storage, aren't you?

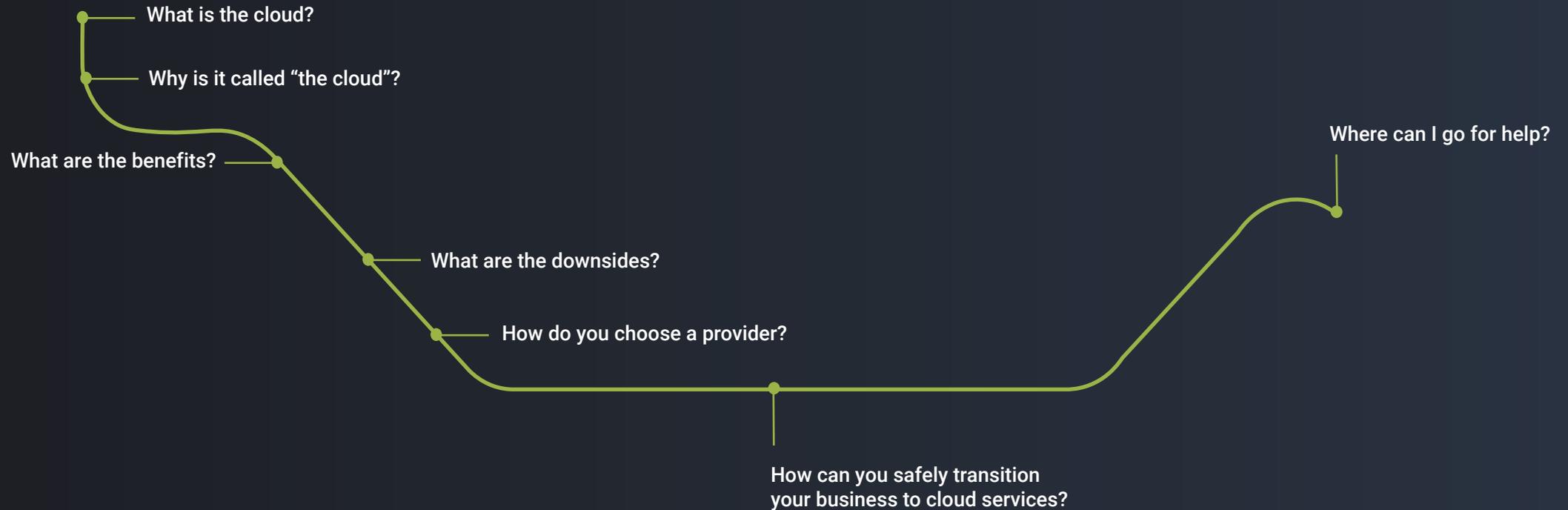
Eh... Yeah, just started.

# WHAT IS THE CLOUD?

Your cloud computing questions answered.

What is the cloud and how does it benefit my business?  
We cover all the basics. Plus, learn how to pick a trustworthy cloud service provider .

# What will you find out?



# What is the Cloud?

Your cloud computing questions answered.

We Scots love to talk about the weather: Dreich. Haar. Pure Baltic. So if you stuck your head out of the window and looked up when you first heard people talking about 'the cloud', we don't blame you.

As you probably know by now, the cloud isn't a meteorological phenomenon, but a computing term.

Last year's sharp rise in remote working saw many business owners scrambling to adopt cloud computing to help their employees work from home. But the sudden transition also revealed a lack of understanding about the cloud, both its benefits and its risks.

When we speak with business owners about cloud computing, we're often asked questions like:

- I like to keep everything in-house: why should we move to the cloud?
- How can cloud computing benefit my business?
- Do we need a backup of the cloud?
- How much does it cost and how do we budget for it?
- Aye, Aye, but fit dis this cloud thingie hae tae dae wi me?

We'll be answering these questions and more in a series of articles about the cloud. In this article, we'll cover the basics of cloud computing and its significance for businesses.



## What is the Cloud?

In simple terms, **'the cloud' describes data**, software and services that are accessible through the internet instead of your computer's hard drive or company server.

After you've created an account, you can access cloud computing resources from anywhere with an internet connection, whether that's Aberdeen, Adelaide or Abu Dhabi.

Using the cloud to store information is no different from using the server that lives in your computer room, except it is fully managed by a third-party.

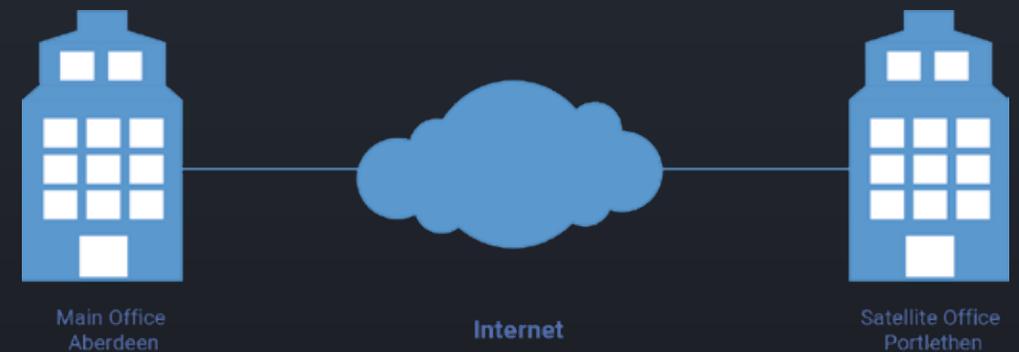
It's a simple way to describe the process of transferring data from one location to another. ▶

## Why is it called 'the cloud'?

IT engineers like to draw pictures. It's not just because they're budding artists: simple illustrations are easy ways to describe computing systems to fellow engineers and laypeople.

Engineers use a cloud symbol as shorthand for 'the internet'. You can describe network connections between two locations by drawing two lines with a cloud symbol connecting them in the centre.

For example, using Microsoft Visio you can show a connection between two offices:



# What are the Benefits?

Now that you know what cloud computing is, it's time to answer the burning question: How can it benefit your business? Let's count the ways...



## Reduce Overheads

Managing your IT infrastructure takes up company resources, making it a significant business overhead. By moving many parts of your IT system to the cloud, your business will no longer need to manage:

- Hardware and software
- Security updates
- System reliability
- Data backup
- Disaster recovery
- Keeping the service secure
- Management, monitoring and maintenance
- Service performance and speed

Instead, this responsibility is passed to expert providers, giving you more time to focus on the business areas that benefit from your expertise.

## Scale with your needs

Cloud services let you choose the amount of storage and number of user accounts you need, making them suitable for businesses of every size. As your business grows, you can upgrade to more comprehensive versions of the service.

## Instant Updates

Moving services to the cloud gives your business far more flexibility and agility. Cloud services are accessible from anywhere with an internet connection. The service that you use in the office is the same as the service used remotely. That's a significant benefit for businesses with offshore or remote site teams, and those with travelling employees.

## Automatic Backups

Data loss can devastate a business. When you use cloud services, that's less of a concern as the provider has a responsibility to keep the infrastructure running for you. So long as you set it up right everything gets backed and this simplifies your disaster recovery and business continuity plans.

## Cherry-pick your services

Cloud computing lets you choose the services that are most suitable for your business. At a minimum, most companies use cloud email services, but increasingly, companies are seeking to make every computing programme essential to their business operations accessible via the cloud.

## Remote Access

Moving services to the cloud gives your business far more flexibility and agility. Cloud services are accessible from anywhere with an internet connection. The service that you use in the office is the same as the service used remotely. That's a significant benefit for businesses with offshore or remote site teams, and those with travelling employees.

# What are the Downsides?

Even the best things in life have their downsides (with the exception of a cold beer on a Friday evening). Despite its many benefits, cloud computing does come with some risks.



### **You don't own anything!**

Access to cloud services is usually subscription-based, meaning you lose access to the service when you stop paying for it.

### **You need a stable internet connection**

While you can access the systems from anywhere, their performance is dependent on the speed of the local internet connection. You'll see a slower service the slower the connection.

### **You're entrusting a third-party provider**

Although the majority of cloud services have robust security measures in place, you are still putting your faith in a third-party provider to protect your data.

# How Do you Choose a Provider?

Choosing reliable providers is one of the most important things to get right when transitioning to cloud services. In the real world, you wouldn't trust just anyone with important information about your business.

You should apply that same reasoning to cloud-based services. Asking questions about your provider should help to inform your decision. Due diligence checks should include the following questions:



## Due diligence checks should include the following questions:

- **Is the provider well known?**

You should be able to check this through a simple Google search.

- **Can you speak to other customers who have used their services?**

Check third-party review platforms like TrustPilot and Google Business, or independent forums.

- **Can the provider tell you where they will store your data?**

Remember, GDPR and data protection laws still apply when you use cloud services, so you need reassurance that you're not storing sensitive data in the wrong country.

Even if the primary data centre is in the UK, you'll need to check whether the provider replicates data to another centre in a different country or whether it plans to transmit your data via an unencrypted system.

- **Can you find out the company's financial standing?**

If the provider goes out of business, you could risk losing access to the service and your data.

- **What kind of data centre does the provider use?**

Data centres are classified into four tiers, with tier four being the most secure. You should avoid using a provider who doesn't publish details about its data centre classification.

- **Will your data be encrypted?**

Ideally, all data should be encrypted. That means even if somebody accesses your data, who shouldn't, they won't be able to understand it without decrypting it using a key (usually a password).

- **If your data will be encrypted, who will have the encryption key?**

In a best-case scenario, the encryption key should belong to you alone. That way, not even someone with access to the data centre will be able to access your encrypted data.

- **How do you access help and support and how responsive is the provider?**

You should be able to gauge this from other customers' reviews or even through comments on social media.



# How can you safely transition your business to cloud services?

A provider that meets the appropriate standards should instill you with the confidence needed to adopt their services. But there are still a number of steps to take to ensure a smooth transition to the cloud.



## Steps to follow:

### STEP 1 : Work with your provider.

It's not a good idea to start the transition without your IT team or external provider's involvement. You should engage them early in the process so that they can offer their insight and advice.

### STEP 2: Check your internet connection.

A slow internet connection will slow down performance. If you're planning to work from one central office, you'll need to ensure that your internet connection is good enough for multiple employees to use at once.

If you plan to work remotely, make sure you and your team have internet connections stable enough to use the cloud services effectively.

### STEP 4: Get your budget right

You should make sure you understand the ongoing costs of your cloud service subscriptions. It's important to check for additional costs which may arise when your resource requirements increase.

### STEP 3: Establish work processes early on.

Every workplace has processes to ensure efficiency and consistency. Yours will probably need to change when moving to a cloud-based system, so make sure everyone has the appropriate training and establish best practices as soon as possible.



If your business is based in Aberdeen or Aberdeenshire, get in touch with us.  
We'll be there to keep your cloud systems running smoothly, whatever the weather.

# Where can I go for help?

Moving to cloud services is definitely a job for the IT department. If you'd like to transition to a cloud-based system, you should always consult your IT team or external provider in the first instance.

They're best placed to understand the implications of a move to cloud services. They'll also know how to deal with dependencies that you might not be aware of.

If you don't have access to IT expertise, you can appoint an external IT provider to support you.

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