

A CIO's Guide to Cloud Computing: Everything You Need to Know



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Chatbots officially hit the mainstream in 2016 with the news that the biggest online players, including Facebook and Microsoft, are embracing the technology.

In contrast to chat-based bots of the past -- those primitive agents often incapable of anything but pre-scripted spam advertising -- the most sophisticated modern chatbots can simulate a near-human level of conversational fluency.

As everybody from marketers and retailers to technical support departments anticipate the possibilities wrought by the technology's growth, any customer-facing organization that doesn't have its own plans for bots is likely to be left behind.

Here is what chief information officers and their subordinates need to know about the past, present and future of chatbots in 2017.

Cloud Computing Offers Several Options

Contrary to what most people understand, cloud computing is not limited to one service type. Three main versions include:

- **Public:** Usually the least expensive option, the organization is granted the required allotment on infrastructure that is shared.
- **Private:** Dedicated infrastructure that offers higher security and meets strict compliance regulations; usually a higher cost than public.
- **On-Premise:** Requires onsite infrastructure and IT support yet offers greater control over environment details.

Determining which cloud computing option is best suited to the organization will depend on the level of security required to meet compliance if required, budgetary considerations and the degree of IT involvement in maintaining the company networks.

Flexible and Scalable IT Service Delivery

CIOs are typically charged with keeping ahead of dynamic business strategies and growth facilitation. Cloud computing offers the flexibility and scalability to adapt as fast as the organization's needs change, without the need for using capital expenditures to meet growth. One of the biggest challenges of meeting the needs of dynamic businesses is that technology advances so quickly, infrastructure becomes outdated before realizing maximum ROI. Cloud computing eliminates this challenge completely.

All enterprises experience periods of flux that require greater network resources at some points and less at others. The agile nature of cloud computing allows them to scale their operations in order to increase requirements when necessary, then decrease them accordingly during slower periods. In cases where organizations are in a growth phase, increases can be made as required rather than the guesswork involved in anticipating future needs.

Cloud Computing Frees IT to Focus on Business Processes

Operating in the cloud and using SaaS (with the exception of on-premise solutions) means IT staff no longer has to handle the infrastructure the software is run on, take care of database and software management, or worry about performance and compliance improvements. Some CIOs may see that as a threat to their departments, rendering them obsolete. However, this is not the case. Cloud computing may allow for a smaller IT force, but the staff can focus on business processes that are often delayed and applications that require review for security purposes, and can ensure that all on-site equipment is working up to par. Cloud computing may lead to transition of the enterprise's IT department but it will not render the need for staff obsolete.

Improves Security While Reducing Complexity

Adopting cloud services enables centralization of security management through SaaS services. This allows for management of identity and access, monitoring of file integrity and encryption for applications being used in the cloud. For IT security teams, Shadow IT is currently threatening their efforts at protecting their organizations' data assets. Fortunately, cloud computing can greatly diminish the issue. As an added bonus, when employed for email, SaaS-based services can also detect anomalies that signify phishing attempts and protect against potentially harmful spam better than plugins or anti-spam platforms due to their scale and access to data. When combined with in-house security measures on devices, implementing the appropriate cloud security measures can make organizations virtually impenetrable.

Allows for Changes Without Disruption

With an innovative product such as Unit4's Cloud at Your Speed, software can be added or removed quickly and effortlessly, allowing for expedient resolutions to problems organizations may face. Implementing new software does not disrupt the current work being performed on the SaaS, which helps produce seamless integrations and greater productivity. Even sweeping change such as company mergers can be completed in a mere fraction of the time over in-house services since there is no requirement for re-coding or changes to the database or setup.

Develop a Strategy for Migration

To ensure success with cloud deployment, CIOs need to develop a sound strategy and prepare employees for the transition. All eyes will be on the IT department if there are challenges during the migration, although most issues can be avoided with preparation. Some considerations of note include:

- Working closely with the cloud provider to determine the needs of the organization and the best method of deployment.
- Determining what assets should be migrated based on their value to the enterprise.
- Testing applications to be transferred to ensure they will transition smoothly and will not interrupt workflows.
- Ensure the company's network is secure, reliable and fast enough to accommodate the use of cloud services.

It is important to emphasize here that the leading cause for costly errors when migrating to cloud-based services is the lack of a detailed strategy for the deployment.

What to Expect From Cloud Computing in the Near Future

Cloud computing is advancing at an accelerated pace, so it is important that CIOs are aware of these developments and their impact on organizations. IT is often the go-to when colleagues are seeking information on how technologies will affect their positions. Here are a few talking points:

- While cost savings have been a driving force behind migrating to the cloud, price will become increasingly less important. As users become more comfortable with the adoption, the focus will shift to meeting expectations and compounding on the other efficiencies realized.
- Since cloud-based SaaS is accessible on any device with an internet connection, greater flexibility in where jobs are performed will be realized. Telecommuting will continue to gain popularity where possible, but the downside is there is often a blurring of the expected work hours since one is never truly "away" from work.
- Collaboration will be easier and more effective as standardized tools are accessible by all employees. The ability to share information, make entries into project management applications and access data for collaborative efforts will be streamlined and less errors will be made due to unified apps employed.
- Frustration over wait times for approvals and implementation of applications by the IT department will be virtually eliminated, ensuring everyone within the organization has the tools they need, when they need them.

Adopting the cloud has great benefits over maintaining data centers and IT infrastructure that cannot easily be scaled to meet the needs of today's dynamic enterprises. To leverage the benefits and minimize the potential hazards that come with sweeping change, consider the adaptability and ease of Unit4's Cloud at Your Speed. With a number of alternatives to meet a wide range of requirements, every organization's unique needs can be met.

About Unit4

Unit4 is a leading provider of enterprise applications empowering people in service organizations. With annual revenue of over 600M Euro and more than 4200 employees worldwide, Unit4 delivers ERP, industry-focused and best-in-class applications. Thousands of organizations from sectors including professional services, public services, not-for-profit, real estate, wholesale, financial services and education benefit from Unit4 solutions.

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