

10 Of The Best Cloud Based Services For Small Businesses

Understanding how this works

The recent increase in internet speeds and the rollout of superfast fibre-optic broadband has resulted in a new age of computing, with technology being built at a fast pace around the 'Cloud Computing' environment. Understanding how this works is crucial for businesses to remain flexible, fast and dynamic, not to mention maintaining an edge over their competition.

'Cloud Computing' basically refers to online products and solutions which are available across the internet. Using a range of these products in any sized business will reduce hardware, software and IT maintenance costs, while increasing productivity and the ability to securely share data.

1. Microsoft Online – BPOS (Business Productivity Online Suite)

This is a suite of products online (and hosted in the Cloud) that they have bundled together to call BPOS (Business Productivity Online Suite). They are hosted messaging and collaboration solutions, including Microsoft Exchange Online, Microsoft SharePoint Online, Microsoft Office Live Meeting and Microsoft Office Communications Online. BPOS is priced as a bundle package and has two flavours, the full version which integrates with your present desktop systems (e.g. Outlook) and also comes with the web clients or the 'desk less' version which contains just the web clients. Each application can also be bought separately.

Pros: All the features from an in-house server, without the maintenance and responsibility of owning it, massive 25GB Outlook mailboxes, no training required for staff familiar with Office products, webapps soon to be released in Office 365.

Cons: SharePoint has limited storage per company, not as cheap as Google Apps Premium.

Website: www.microsoft.com/en/gb/mediumbusiness/products/cloudonlineservices/onlineservices.aspx

'Buzzword'

You may notice a buzzword when it comes to online solutions is 'collaboration'. In this context it refers to enabling users, such as colleagues and staff, the ability to share and work effectively together.

If you have any questions, want to trial or need help setting up any of these solutions, Fenton I.T are experts and resellers for most products listed.



About Fenton IT

Fenton IT is a young and dynamic, professional services business providing expert IT support, management and consultancy to a wide range of small and medium sized businesses in the South East.

IT Support
Cloud Solutions
Telecoms
IT Consultancy
Web Design & Hosting

2. Google Apps Premium

Google Apps is a set of Google's hosted messaging and collaboration solutions. They include Gmail (for email), Google Calendar (for diary management), Google Talk (instant messenger), Google Sites (collaboration web sharing and content management), Google Docs (word processing, spreadsheets and presentations). It's priced as a bundle package for businesses and is sold under as Google Apps Premium

Pros: New services and features being added all the time, excellent value for money, very resilient infrastructure

Cons: Possible privacy concerns regarding data

Website: www.google.com/apps/intl/en-GB/business/index.html

3. DropBox

Dropbox is a Web-based file hosting service, it enables users and computers to store and share files and folders with one another across the internet using file synchronization. The software automatically syncs across all computers when new files or changes are detected. It's available in a free and paid for version, the free version offers up to 2GB of online storage and the paid version starts at 50GB for around £7 per month.

Pros: Offers military grade security encryption of data, files can be accessed from iPhone, Blackberry and Android phones

Cons: All data is stored on your local computer so use of encryption software such as Truecrypt recommended. Only one folder can be shared between computers

Website: www.dropbox.com

4. Syncplicity

A similar product to Dropbox that syncs files across computers across multiple locations, backs-up data and makes easy sharing of data across the internet. Syncplicity offers the ability to share and sync any folder you choose, whereas Dropbox only allows a single folder to be shared. Syncplicity enables control of shared folders, which makes it a great product for small businesses. It comes in a personal Free (not for commercial use) version, and a paid for Business version with 50GB storage and 3 user license starting at £28 per month.

Pros: Bank grade security encryption, syncs with Google Apps and Zoho, allows the sharing of multiple folders

Cons: All data is stored is on local computer – use of Truecrypt recommended

Website: www.syncplicity.com

5. MozyPro

An automated, schedulable online back-up solution that eliminates the need for office staff to remember to; monitor back-up routines; and rotate tapes or disks and keep them stored safely. Such manual processes require human interaction, which is prone to forgetfulness and failure. All back-ups are made to military secure encrypted off-site servers. As the solution is web based, it offers secure access to all backup files from anywhere on the internet. It supports open and locked file backups, so files are backed up even if they are in use. It comes in a desktop or server based version, both offer up to 30 days recovery. Prices start at £3.99 per desktop with £0.50 per GB per month, £6.99 per server with £0.50 per GB per month.

Pros: Simple to use, affordable and secure, supports backups to both local and online locations, server version supports SQL, Active Directory and Microsoft Exchange backups. No more manual back-up changes

Cons: No support for Linux, support needs improvement, large restores of data can take days

Website: www.mozy.co.uk/pro

6. Zoho

Similar to Google Apps, Zoho provides a wide range of online applications for businesses, with more than 20 different applications including; Collaboration, Business, and Productivity applications. All applications are delivered over the internet, requiring only a web browser, which means the applications and your data is stored on their secure online servers.

Pros: Many of the Zoho apps integrate with Google apps, the Project and Invoicing apps are very useful

Cons: Google Apps has more integration options with third party applications, all data and apps are reliant on a stable web connection

Website: www.zoho.com

7. OpenAir

OpenAir is an online, web based system that offers project-based organizations the necessary tools to effectively manage resources, monitor time-schedules, control expenses and optimize employee efficiency. It comes in 3 editions; Team, Professional and Enterprise.

Pros: Can be used as your line of business application, without the requirement of an in-house server, back-ups or maintenance, cheaper than an in-house type solution

Cons: Complex product that requires time and training to use effectively

Website: www.openair.com/Solutions/small-medium-business

8. Evernote

This software uses technology to help you organize various types of information from several different sources into one, central, web-based location. The product also allows users to clip web pages and archive them for later reference, store screen shots, photos and text notes, all within a customizable storage system. Evernote also organizes things for you by the date, a note, or when the linked document was created.

Pros: Can be used on most smart phones, accounts with monthly allowance of 40MB are free!

Cons: Data contained in Evernote can only be stored online or local, not both

Website: www.evernote.com

9. Salesforce CRM

This is an online contact management system that can be used to hold all your customers and suppliers data. The solution is web based and can be customised, so there's no need to purchase any hardware or software and the service does not require maintenance or upgrade costs. The small business edition comes in 3 main versions, these include; Contact Manager, which has 3 main features and is priced at £3 per month, Group that includes 6 main features at £17 per month and the Professional edition which offers unlimited users and 9 key features at £45 per month.

Pros: Great value for money, easy to use, trusted brand, can be integrated into most Office products such as Microsoft Outlook

Cons: Customisation options of the product are limited, SLA's are limited to small business products

Website: www.salesforce.com/uk/smallbusinesscenter

10. Memeo Send

Memeo offer a wide range of flexible backup, sync and sharing products. Memeo Send is a product that enables businesses to send large files via email, it's free to use and send documents up to 100MB. It also allows the ability to send multiple folders as well as single files. The Unlimited package size and usage are cheap at either £3 per package or £12 per month.

Pros: Simple to use, cheap, secure and free up to 100MB, available for Windows 7, XP, Vista and Mac OS 10.5.4 upwards

Cons: No Linux support

Website: www.memeo.com/index.php