

# *The Cloud*

A GUIDE FOR  
AUSTRALIAN CONVEYANCERS

Are you concerned about the security of your data when using cloud technology? You're not alone! Your concerns are reasonable since confidentiality is critical to the running of a Conveyancing business or Legal Practice. Cloud technology is used by many but not everyone understands its meaning and how it can be fully utilised in their business.

## **SO, WHAT IS THE “THE CLOUD”?**

“Cloud computing”, “cloud technology” and “cloud storage” are phrases that seem to be thrown around quite frequently these days. However, what do they really mean?

In the simplest terms, cloud computing means storing and accessing data over the Internet instead of locally – say, on your computer's hard drive or a server in your office.

Think of the cloud as a place where your data exists outside of your device. Traditionally your data is stored on a local hard drive or external drive (such as a CD or USB drive) but now you can store your data somewhere else on someone else's server. That server can be in any location.

Your laptop, smartphone and tablet can “talk” to this “cloud” and download the data locally so that it appears on your device. The reason that the cloud has rapidly become so popular is cloud technology makes it easier to work from any location and be more efficient.

Cloud technology can provide significant cost savings for businesses, allowing them to avoid additional hardware purchases such as a server and network infrastructure. Cloud technology can be used to store data and connect computers/devices no matter where these devices are located: in the same office; State or even country. Reputable cloud vendors may also house your data in multiple locations around Australia, meaning data is not only more secure but there is minimal risk information can be lost – and data storage is unlimited.

## THE USER INTERFACE

There are two common interfaces for cloud software:

### 1. Browser Only

Many cloud-based programs operate solely in a browser. This means you view and manipulate your data in a web page and your data is only useable when you are connected over the Internet. The positive of this is you can access the application and your data from any device when connected to the internet. The negatives are:

- » You cannot work offline;
- » You are at the mercy of fluctuating internet speeds;
- » If the Internet drops out, you can potentially lose any unsaved work; and
- » Integration with desktop applications such as Microsoft Word is limited.

### 2. Hybrid Desktop-Cloud

This cloud interface option entails installing a light desktop application that communicates with remote computer servers. iTunes and Microsoft Outlook are two common examples of this model. This model stores data locally on your computer and synchronizes automatically with the remote servers whenever you are connected to the internet.

The advantages of this model are:

- » You can work offline (with some limitations);
- » Your staff are likely to be familiar with these types of applications;
- » Integrations with software such as Microsoft Word and Outlook are fast and reliable; and
- » Your productivity is not limited by internet speed (or reliability).

Smokeball provides a Hybrid Desktop-Cloud solution. This allows users the ability to maximise their productivity and collaborate more efficiently online as well as offline. It can be used on multiple devices and always has the most up-to-date client/matter information in a digital file.

## SECURITY QUESTIONS

As you get closer to selecting a cloud provider you should also consider the following:

1. Where is your data physically located? Conveyancers and Solicitors require their data be physically located in Australia.
2. Do you own your data? It is crucial that your business retains ownership of the information and intellectual property placed into the cloud provider's system.
3. Can you remove your data from the cloud if you decide to cease using the service? In addition, how easy is it to extract your data? Does the provider charge a fee for this?

## WHY MOVE TO THE CLOUD?

### 1. Data Security

It is extremely likely your data is safer with a reputable cloud provider than on a server in your office. Some may disagree but it's probably easier for someone to steal information locally. You also want to be prepared for disastrous situations, to minimise risk and avoid interruptions to your business. You will be using the same technology as those used by leading banks to secure their data.

## 2. Back-Ups

Most businesses do not have adequate back-up systems in place. With a good cloud solution, you no longer need to worry about back-ups. All your data is constantly backed up by your cloud provider and can be easily retrieved at any time, from any location.

## 3. Mobility

How often do you receive a call from a client (or other party) requesting a document but you've just stepped out for several hours? Cloud software allows you to work from anywhere with no complications associated with remote access to computers. There is no longer any need for remote desktop sessions or Terminal Server set ups. This saves both time and money.

## 4. Branch Offices

If you have multiple physical locations, cloud software is a brilliant solution. Cloud technology allows everyone access to the same information in-real time. This eliminates the need for everyone working in the same physical office and provides greater flexibility for your staff.

## 5. Working Remotely

Whether you need to work from home occasionally, in another State or you have staff who need the flexibility to work from home, the cloud makes this simple. You no longer need to worry about how to access your office systems while travelling.

## 6. IT Cost Savings

Cloud technology greatly simplifies the hardware needed to run software, requiring no physical server in your office. You can run your entire business from a laptop!

If you have any questions about cloud software, or would like to see how it could work for your business, you can contact Paul Psaltis on 0418 337 162 or [paul.psaltis@smokeball.com.au](mailto:paul.psaltis@smokeball.com.au).