The Cloud vs. On-Site Solutions:
What Every Funeral Director Should Know

CRaKN

An Intro to Cloud Computing

The cloud is a metaphor commonly used to refer to how storage, servers, software, applications and other computing resources no longer need to be held on-site, or in a physical location.

The concept of cloud computing has become a bit of a buzzword. People use the phrase when talking about internet connected off-site storage.

Thanks to the Internet, cloud technology allows for 24/7 access from anywhere to networks, resources, and data. Put simply, when talking about the cloud, it's when people are accessing information or software that is not on their device by using the Internet.

There are also on-site solutions. On-site solutions, rather than in the cloud, are just what they sound like: solutions that are installed on a user's device or computer—right on-premise, or in their physical location.

The Start of Cloud Computing

During the 1960s, the first mainframe computer was designed, and then, the mini computer and personal computer during the 1980s (1). While no one could have predicted it, these inventions (combined with the Internet) set the stage for a period of time that would transform peoples' and organizations' ability to process and share information.

Fast forward to the last 10 to 15 years, and we now have more than just desktop computers. Thanks to the proliferation of smartphones and other handheld ways of communicating, we have more ability than ever to create, share, and access information from anywhere.

With this change in how we share, access and use information, the way we use computers and the way we communicate has completely transformed.

While many of us don't recognize it, for decades there have been software solutions in the cloud—we just didn't make decisions about it commonly in our business or in our personal lives like we do today.

The Advantages of the Cloud in Our Everyday Lives

More and more, people are getting accustomed to having the ability to access the cloud and the information held in the cloud, from any location. One of the simplest examples that many people use each day is web-based email, such as Gmail.

Without the cloud, those messages could only be managed and sent through an email client (Gmail/Outlook) tied to your personal computer. Instead–for the great majority of people–emails are managed, stored and sent through the cloud. When needed, web-based email can be accessed from any device (such as your phone, iPad, and/or computer) or from any location (at home, work, the coffee shop, etc.), as long as there is access to the Internet.

An increasing number of products used by consumers are moving to the cloud and for good reason.

The Power of the Cloud for Businesses

Cloud-based solutions are becoming more popular as it makes enterprise-quality technology affordable for small businesses. The savings are not only in the technology product itself, but in implementation, learning, training and ongoing maintenance and support.

Clifford Campbell, CTO at CRäKN explains when and how a cloud solution is useful for funeral professionals, and for other businesses alike: "Utilizing the cloud allows a business to focus on providing solutions instead spending money on staffing and managing servers," he says. "So for us, instead of spending resources on infrastructure, we can scale our services to meet demand and deploy new features as fast as we can develop them."

69%

of businesses are already using cloud technology in one capacity or another

Cloud Vs. Non-Cloud: What's Right for Your Funeral Home?

With more and more businesses moving towards the cloud, it begs the question: what should funeral professionals consider when deciding whether to use cloud applications and/or cloud storage of data?

Pros: The arguments in favor of cloud-based solutions

#1: Better operational fit

In today's on-the-go world, many workers - whether in the office or out of the office - can use cloud-based solutions with their devices, such as tablets, to work from anywhere. The result: daily work is much easier, more streamlined, and staff are often able to be more collaborative. For example, if you need to get an idea of all services going on at all your locations, you can easily access the digital whiteboard and review all this information on the go. You no longer need to rely on being in a physical location to review all the activity within your funeral home.

Not only do you have better collaboration and communication at your funeral home, you have more time to spend with families - versus spending all your time managing manual workflows. With cloud solutions, you no longer have to take time to backup your data, which can be extremely time consuming with on-site solutions. In most cases, this is done automatically with cloud solutions. You also don't have to spend time or resources to maintain the software or manage upgrades since the vendor is responsible for those updates.

Wisdom from Alan Creedy

"How to tell if technology has passed you by"

During World War II, the British conducted a special demonstration of the new mechanized artillery for their Russian allies. The exercise was beautifully orchestrated. Each soldier performed with impressive precision, and, of course, each gun scored a bull's eye.

After the drill the British and Russian officers discussed the show and what they had learned. As they were winding down, one Russian raised his hand to ask a question: "I was impressed with how well each soldier functioned as a team and worked in concert for maximum efficiency and effectiveness. But, I noticed with each battery there was a lone soldier standing at attention in the back who seemed to have nothing to do. Can you tell us what his role in mechanized artillery is?" With some embarrassment, the British officers had to admit they didn't know, and quickly dispatched an aide to find out the role of the mystery soldier. Breathlessly, the aide quickly returned to report that it was that soldier's responsibility to hold the horses during firing.

I love this story. It illustrates how modernization overtakes us unaware and we continue to carry legacy policies and systems that no longer apply. So it is with tech and funeral service. vThere is a strong and persistent legacy belief that funeral directors must be present on site 50 – 70 hours a week even when there is nothing for them to do. I think the reason for this belief is anchored in the fact that 40 years ago the technology of communication required someone to staff the funeral home 24/7 in order to receive death calls.

I remember one friend, now in his 80s, who laughs about how he used to have leave his wife a stop by stop list of the errands he was running so she would

know how to find him if they got a call. If they did get a call while he was out, she could look at the clock and know he was at the drugstore or the barber or whatever and call them.

Then pagers enabled us to be reachable anywhere but we still had to have access to a landline. They freed us up to move about as necessary and gave us more flexibility. Then cell phones actually gave us time back in our day. We could be anywhere and still respond to callers in real time.

Now we have smart phones. But the tragedy is we are still using them like the old cell phones. For most of us they are still only communication devices. Yes, we now can text and email, but that is still only communication.

Enter CRäKN, the first concept to enable you to actually have a device think for you. It's the first innovation since cell phones were introduced in the 90s to actually give you back time in your day… Consider using your smart phone for more than a communication device."

Alan Creedy is a premier thought leader and expert when it comes to the needs of the funeral profession. Creedy's critical insights and "outside the box" wisdom focuses in on what practitioners need to do today—and how to prepare for the future.

#2: Ability to be mobile…and work from anywhere, at any time

Did you know the vast majority of Americans – 95% – now own a cellphone of some kind? (7) It may be no surprise then, that "mobile" is almost synonymous with "access" today. That's because when you access a tool in the cloud, you truly can work from anywhere.

That's so important for funeral professionals because it provides greater control to all your information—when you need it most. And, thanks to our smartphones, it's easier than ever to work from anywhere, and having a cloud solution allows people to do just that.

In one study, small to medium-sized businesses that adopted the cloud for increased mobility saw a 40 percent growth in revenues after a year compared to those that did not use the cloud
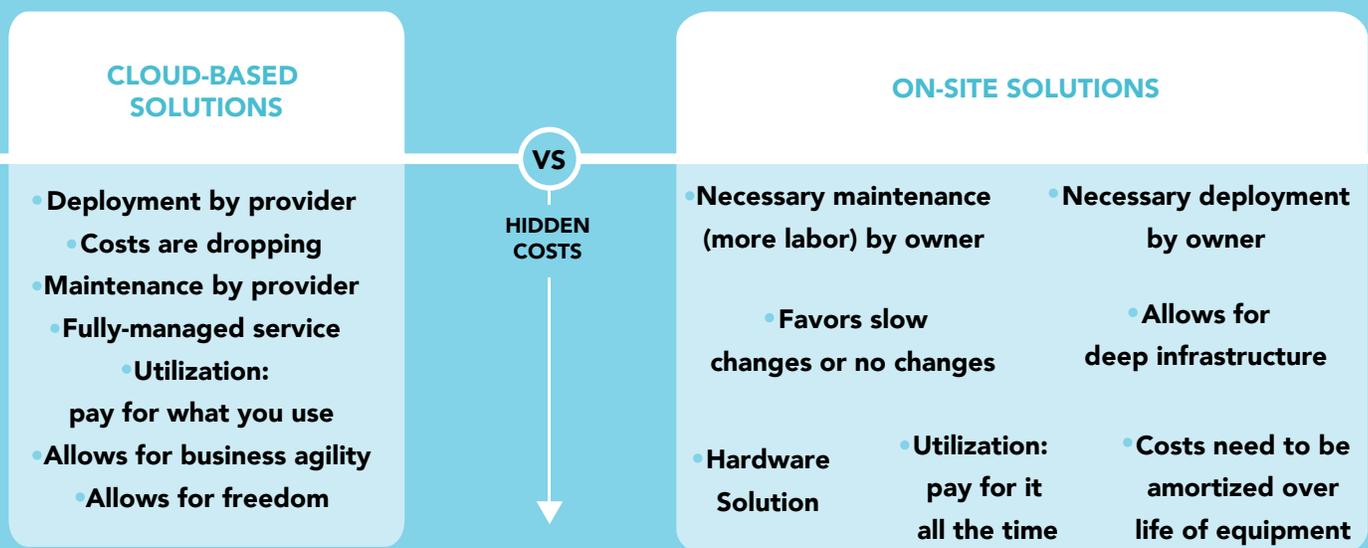
#3: Pricing structures that don't lock you in

Cloud solutions usually require a low-upfront investment as servers and networks do not need to be purchased, installed or staffed. These agreements are also typically set up in a way that is more flexible to the end user. With on-site solutions, you're often tied-in for such a long period of time, you can end up wasting thousands of dollars due to contract length or getting stuck using old technology hardware and/or software.

"For funeral homes and small businesses, this is about the ability to be agile, and on-site works against this. Business owners need a solution that can allow them to make ongoing, effective technical decisions,"

*says Kristen Auguste,
Director, Customer Success at CRäKN.*

Comparing cloud-based to on-site solutions isn't always a true apples to apples comparison:

CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS

- Deployment by provider
- Costs are dropping
- Maintenance by provider
- Fully-managed service
- Utilization: pay for what you use
- Allows for business agility
- Allows for freedom

VS

HIDDEN COSTS

ON-SITE SOLUTIONS

- Necessary maintenance (more labor) by owner
- Necessary deployment by owner
- Favors slow changes or no changes
- Allows for deep infrastructure
- Hardware Solution
- Utilization: pay for it all the time
- Costs need to be amortized over life of equipment

#4: Less up-front and ongoing fees

In addition, you don't have to pay someone to do an installation or maintain the product on an ongoing basis. This is a critical piece for funeral directors to be aware of, as many aren't fully aware of the potential need for ongoing technical support, the ongoing nature of maintenance fees and/or upgrade fees that they can incur with on-site solutions.

Updates and upgrades are typically automatically made for cloud-based products, at no additional effort or cost, unless specified by the provider. "This also speaks to the true power of the cloud, because it allows you to focus on the families you serve, not on system maintenance," adds Auguste.

#5: Pay for what you use

Not only do cloud-based agreements not lock you in, but there are varying levels of pricing models based on features, volume and/or number of users for many cloud-based solutions.

No matter what a particular pricing model is, typically the benefit is that you "pay for what you use and as you go," making cloud-based applications affordable for small businesses—today and in the future as you grow.

For many funeral directors, this means even greater cost (and time) savings, and ease of setup, when acquiring another firm. This helps funeral home's maintain profit margins when scaling, rather than incurring additional, unforeseen costs when scaling.

#6: World-class security

Making sure that business data is secure is critical to every funeral home. One of the biggest misconceptions about cloud-based solutions is that they are somehow less secure because of being "in the cloud."

Rather, cloud providers have the pooled resources to retain the top experts in security. "In a market beset by a shortage of security experts, organizations deploying solutions on-site frequently find it difficult to hire enough skilled security workers," says Altiscale CEO Raymie Stata (2).

"Cloud providers, due to their willingness to devote greater financial resources to security, can more successfully hire and retain workers with world-class expertise," he explains (2).

These providers also are on top of the latest security measures because it's their area of expertise, and because they have to be, says Stata. "Security is a fundamental requirement of their business," he says, admitting that "it's also easier for cloud providers to secure their systems because they tend to be less complex and not dependent on older technologies" (2).

Stata says that on the other hand, on-site systems are typically composed of technology from various eras, making some security updates much more cumbersome for all involved. "Some of this aging infrastructure will be less secure because it was developed to protect against less-sophisticated threats, and the mixture of technologies will likely leave more openings for a hacker to exploit," he says (2).

94%

of business reported an improvement in security after switching to the cloud (3)

#7: Compatibility

Cloud-solutions also deliver the most flexibility in

regard to compatibility. As Stata alludes to, software solutions that are even a few years old are sometimes dependent upon or restricted to operating in certain environments.

For instance, some only operate on the Windows Operating System, so those solutions wouldn't work on a Mac Operating System. For example, CRäKN works on all operating systems and across all devices. Given that smartphone and computer technology is changing so rapidly, cloud-based solutions can help prevent the need to invest even more capital to "keep up" on the hardware side.

#8: Ease of set-up

Not to be forgotten is the actual setup time for cloud versus on-site. While every cloud solution may differ depending on the nature of the software, on-site solutions are almost guaranteed to take days if not weeks to fully setup and deploy—not to mention the need for on-site technical resources to do so. This often requires "all hands on deck" which can be near impossible for funeral homes to put all their normal work aside to setup, deploy, and train around a new platform.

A solution such as CRäKN, on the other hand, has a much quicker time for implementation. CRäKN takes one day, or less, to fully setup, thanks to the nature of the platform being based in the cloud.

This translates to a competitive advantage for firms that are leveraging cloud-based software to help their people work more efficiently and effectively.

With "anytime, anywhere" access to the software they use to do their work, cloud-based applications help employees to have more flexibility in where they can get work done. "If a funeral director heads out for the evening, they no longer have to go back to the funeral home to make updates to a case" explains Auguste. "When the software is in the cloud, they can do that high priority task, edit the case, or get more organized wherever they are, which we are seeing helps them work more productively," explains Auguste.

WHAT IS THE LARGEST BENEFIT OF A CLOUD-BASED BUSINESS SOFTWARE VS. INSTALLED?

38.7%
Easier to deploy and manage

14.6%
Quicker to implement

13.2%
Less IT support needed

12.4%
Lower cost

13%
Ease of use

4.6%
Greater security

3.6%
Other

https://www.teamsupport.com/blog/top-3-benefits-cloud-software

Cons: The considerations against cloud-based solutions

The reasons why the cloud is so advantageous—and so much easier on funeral professionals—than on-site is evident. So what are the arguments for on-site solutions—and why are those sometimes false or misleading?

#1: Requires Internet connectivity

The benefits of the cloud are typically most advantageous when there is a connection to the Internet. That said, this so-called weakness of cloud technology also relates back to its underlying advantage: the fact that the applications can be accessed via the Internet, which provides the flexibility to use anytime, anywhere.

Mobile and WiFi alternatives and the increasing popularity of hotspots makes internet connectivity even less of an issue for those who use cloud-based software. "Hotspots and mobile access allow for secure, on-demand Internet from any of the staff members' devices, truly allowing them to have access to the Internet almost anywhere," explains Campbell.

#2: Perceived lack of control

A benefit of utilizing a cloud-based solution is that ongoing updates to the software are pushed to you, the end user—rather than you having to actually implement and/or deploy those updates yourself.

At the same time, that can be a perceived drawback for people because you may or may not "control" the specific update schedule or product roadmap. However, many times, product updates and/or functionality changes are deployed during times that the software provider can see are the lowest usage times for the end user.
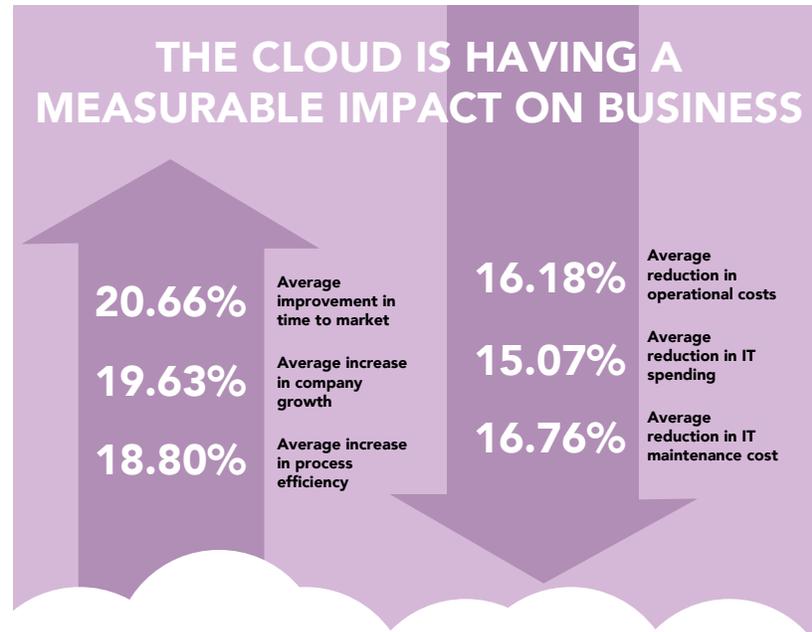
"This flexibility and desire for control must be weighed with the challenges of customization, which include increased cost and management," adds Campbell.

#3: Potential for switching costs

While cloud solutions are typically much more flexible and accessible than on-site solutions, with any software (cloud or not) there are switching costs involved whenever you switch to a new platform or system.

Many providers still haven't figured out an easy way to allow you to migrate or integrate your data easily. This is not a new problem, but the cloud should actually make this easier and in some cases it has not.

When selecting a cloud-based solution, make sure you will have the ability to import data from your old solution (or existing way of working, if not software-based). You don't want to lose all your data or have to re-enter it all.

THE CLOUD IS HAVING A MEASURABLE IMPACT ON BUSINESS

20.66% Average improvement in time to market

19.63% Average increase in company growth

18.80% Average increase in process efficiency

16.18% Average reduction in operational costs

15.07% Average reduction in IT spending

16.76% Average reduction in IT maintenance cost

https://www.skyhighnetworks.com/cloud-security-blog/11-advantages-of-cloud-computing-and-how-your-business-can-benefit-from-them/

CRäKN: The Cloud-Based Solution To Manage Your Funeral Home
Take care of your families by simplifying data entry, administration and form preparation

It's easy to see how the advantages of cloud-based solutions outweigh the potential drawbacks. Decreased time for setup, increase in expertise managing your solution, and less monitoring and upkeep for your funeral home are just a few of the key reasons why cloud-based solutions have been, and will continue to be, the optimal solution for your firm.

It's time that you and your team have the ability to focus on your core business. After all, our goal is to help you run your funeral home and better serve your families.

CRäKN can help you better manage and plan all your funerals, in one place, to you save time, keep you more organized than ever, prevent re-work, and much more. Learn more by requesting a demo today.

Get CRäKN Today!

Resources:

1. http://freakonomics.com/podcast/american-growth/

2. http://data-informed.com/spark-and-hadoop-in-the-cloud-or-on-premise/

3. https://www.salesforce.com/hub/technology/benefits-of-cloud/

4. https://www.teamsupport.com/blog/top-3-benefits-cloud-software

5. https://www.skyhighnetworks.com/cloud-security-blog/11-advantages-of-cloud-computing-and-how-your-business-can-benefit-from-them/

6. https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomgillis/2015/09/02/cost-wars-data-center-vs-public-cloud/#6df0949e923f

7. http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/

8. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/01/6-facts-about-americans-and-their-smartphones/

9. http://www.silver-lining.com/news/8-facts-and-interesting-tidbits-about-the-cloud.html

10. https://www.handshake.com/blog/why-saas-cloud-benefits-vs-on-premise-software/

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