Personal Computing on the fly

By *bigbearomaha*
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The cloud. It's the talk of the town and has been growing for awhile now.

I use desktop and laptop computers for everything from business tasks like creating spreadsheets, databases entry, document creation and so much more. On the personal side, the computer gets used for entertainment (or distraction) schoolwork, research, and communication. More than ever, the computers get used for communication.

The internet and world wide web have been dominant in terms of communication. E-mail, social networks, forums, instant messaging and more. It is no secret that communication and porn have probably been the two biggest drivers of the internet.

What does the cloud have to offer? Mostly it's providing traditionally local activities as an online service. Data storage, office apps, multimedia playback and more like that.

For me, the "pros" of the cloud boils down to one thing: portability. You can access your files and data anywhere you go as long as you can get a connection.

I admit, this can be a very nice thing. Having a lot of data and extremely useful files and documents at hand where ever you go without having to keep all of it on a laptop hard drive is very handy.

The "cons" for me though are brought down to only a few points, but very important ones. Security, accessibility and privacy.

Talking about security, I still see WAY too many websites that want to collect information when you sign up that are not secure. There are WAY too many content providers and data storage providers reporting being hacked with information being stolen.

Accessibility is another problem. I don't care what they say their projected uptime is, most companies offering data storage or information collecting apps, etc... will be down sometime. The question is, when it goes down, for whatever reasons, will it be at the time you need to get to that data? Third party providers are offering a lot of interesting data collection services available.

I can think of 2 big providers offering beekeeping data collection services. Great idea, if the stored data is available. What if when you collect that data out in the field using your laptop or smartphone, etc... it's all going well, but when you get to somewhere where you need to look at that information and show it to a customer or employee or just a buddy who is helping you and that service or website has crashed or is down for support or any other reason?

I've been in that situation with third party providers and I have to tell you, it really sucks to not be able to get your data when you need it.

Lastly, I mentioned privacy. How vigorously will you defend who has access to your data on your computers? Will a third party defend your information as vigorously as you? Not likely.

Third party providers just want to stay in business. They don't want to be in the middle of a headache. If the government wants access to you specific data, the third party provider might give token resistance, but only as far as the law will allow. Some won't even hold out that long.

Now even if the "if you have nothing to hide" crowd had a point, which they don't, you may have a hundred different reasons for keeping your information private and none of them being illegal. Only you can keep your data as private as you want it to be.

As for me, I like building "clouds" but I want control over my cloud. I have my own servers that run the cloud type apps I want access to in my own house. I set them up as secure (https) sites with my own certificates. I do scheduled downtime to best ensure they are up when I need them to be.

Now, not everyone has or wants the ability to set up their own local servers. I understand that. But if I must choose between private, local clouds or public, third party clouds, I tend to stick with the big boys like Google. No, it's not nearly as private as I really want it to be, they do have pretty good uptimes and availability and they will at least make the legal beagles get a warrant before they turn your information over.

I won't use it for anything other than things I don't care are made public though. The first rule of the internet still applies. "If you want it to be private, DON'T put it on the internet."

If you are willing and able to make private clouds, cloud computing is a very nice way to get things done on the run.

If not, you are taking your chances really should minimize what you put out there.

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