



CRM On The ***Cloud*** ?

SaaS (software as a service) cloud computing is the latest technology being advanced for implementing CRM solutions for organizations large and small. Is this just another techno-fad or is there really something to it? I will answer that question by reviewing the three choices available for implementing CRM systems— their advantages and disadvantages.

Traditional Client/Server

Most CRM systems today, particularly those used by large organizations, are implemented on large in-house servers that sit behind the corporate firewall. Access is enabled via secure LANs (local area networks.) Remote applications are linked to the system using a synchronized methodology or Citrix. Traditional client/server CRM systems have been used for a long time. They are very stable. However, the nature of these systems require that remote copies of the database be resident on the users' laptops or be accessed by secure Citrix connections. If the remote copies are lost, stolen or compromised, this data may be compromised or fall into the wrong hands.

Traditional Web-Based

These systems are accessed over the intranet or extranet, which replace the traditional LAN or Citrix access methodology. The data is accessed only while it is being used, so hundreds of copies of the database are no longer circulating outside the firewall on laptops.

However, the web-based implementations still rely on large amounts of server infrastructure which must be purchased and maintained behind the firewall.

SaaS Cloud

With this approach the entire implementation is out on the web, and protected by advanced security systems. The benefits are many:

Access Everywhere: Cloud-based CRM systems are accessible from anywhere there is Internet access.

Lower Hardware Costs: Hardware and much of the software requirements are standardized and this infrastructure is provided at a reasonable cost.

Lower Support Costs: Since there is no hardware or software to maintain behind the firewall, the CRM budget item for IT support is drastically reduced.

Faster Implementation: With either the client/server or the webbased approaches to CRM, you normally need to build separate environments for development, testing, production and disaster recovery before you can focus your real objective—robust CRM that improves both customer satisfaction and sales force efficiency. With cloud-based implementations you can skip all the preliminaries and get to the heart of the matter.

Why not?

With all of these advantages, why wouldn't an organization adopt a cloud-based CRM implementation strategy? Because some institutions have made an executive-level policy decision that all proprietary and sensitive customer data must remain behind the firewall. These currently firm policies are likely to change as "the cloud" develops a longer historical record for impregnable security.

Many other organizations are confident that the cloud is very secure because it passes all major banking and financial testing procedures. They have moved beyond the question of "if?" and on to the important question of "which?" If you represent one of these institutions, here are ten important questions to ask as you evaluate your CRM On The Cloud options:

1. What is the cost structure per user?
2. What is the developer's implementation methodology?
3. Can the cloud solution integrate with legacy LAN and web-based systems?
4. Is the SaaS cloud provider's environment available for custom development work?
5. What tests are used to ascertain the security of my data?
6. Can I control the timeframe for upgrades and hot fixes to my system?
7. Does the developer's mythology match with our IT view?
8. Does the developer have previous cloud-based CRM implementation experience?
9. Should I convert from my current in house client server or web based system to a cloud based system? If so, what are the benefits we will get?
10. The most important question of all: How quickly can implementation be completed so I can begin enjoying the improved customer satisfaction and sales force efficiency advantages of a finely tuned CRM system?

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I'd like to know what you think.

About Ambit Software

Ambit Software helps enterprises globally to become agile - adapt rapidly and cost effectively in response to changes in the business environment through the efficient use of IT. Ambit partners with its clients to understand their business pain points and arrives at appropriate IT led interventions to deliver a relevant solution.

Ambit helps organizations across sectors such as Discrete and Process Manufacturing, Financial Services, Logistics, Consumer Goods, Hospitality etc. to achieve their business goals through effective use of technology.