

A Cloud is Only Fog

The current buzz-phrases du jour are “Cloud computing” and “In the cloud”.

If you ask the average person what these phrases mean, they don't know. If you ask the average I.T. person what it means they also don't feel they really



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know. I know what it means, and I'll be happy to tell you in simple and understandable terms.

The cloud is the Internet. “Cloud Computing” and “In the Cloud” are marketing terms to make something old seem like something brand new! It is designed to create hype in the absence of novelty.

When you see things like “Cloud Computing” all they are saying is “on the Internet”. It really is that simple.

Do you use a webmail account? Something like Yahoo mail, or Gmail? It is cloud mail. Have you ever bought something online? Perhaps you have used eBay or Amazon.com? This is cloud-based online shopping.

Have you ever filled out a survey online? This is polling in the cloud.

There are a variety of new services that will come to be in the future, and they will use the Internet. Antivirus and other security products will utilize the Internet much more extensively than they do today. We already see such offerings — such as online office applications like word processors and spreadsheets — that you do not install on your computer but rather access from your web browser. Early on these were called “collaborative” applications. Today they are called “In the cloud services.”

There is an old sales adage that says “sell the sizzle, not the steak.” This is particularly good advice when your steak is dog meat. “In the cloud” is designed to shroud products and services in fog, to make it difficult to see. Because something is new, or at least marketed as such, it doesn't mean it's good.

Sarah Palin recently learned something about “in the cloud” email. When your data is on the Internet, it has a level of susceptibility. If you use something like Google Docs, your data is not in your control. That's the thing about “the cloud”, it means it is on the Internet and not in your control. There are times that doing things on the Internet makes a lot of sense, but just because a company throws around marketing terms, it doesn't mean it is good or even makes sense. So, when you see “Cloud” marketing, remember that a cloud is simply a container of fog and fog obstructs vision. The next thing to do is change the word cloud to Internet because that is precisely what it means. Then you can evaluate the product or service with an unobstructed view.

If you wish to submit questions or comments to “Ask the Expert” please feel free to send them to askeset@eset.com.



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