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IRCA Response to the ACCAN Position Statement on Cloud Computing

14/11/12

RESPONSE TO THE POSITION STATEMENT ON CLOUD COMPUTING

We acknowledge that cloud computing is very valuable for the remote sector. It allows access by users spread over multiple sites, using various devices, and remotely in the field.

However, we also aware that poor internet connections (or a lack of internet access) are common in remote areas of Australia, which is the main consideration when recommending cloud based services for remote area users.

Notwithstanding the challenges of internet access, there are good reasons to adopt cloud based solutions to address common issues experienced by users in remote areas:

- Off-site storage (especially archives and backups) are advisable for users working in remote locations
- Staff turnover
- Difficulty of obtaining on-site tech support
- Remote access from multiple locations
- Working with service providers based in regional centres
- Collaborative tools (such as google apps, basecamp etc)
- Version control

We support and encourage the use of Australia-based cloud services where possible for the following reasons:

- may reduce latency
- may address sovereignty and legal concerns
- may provide local employment
- may offer local technical support

Concerns

- Lack of good quality, 'always on' internet access
- Security of data: is it safe from interference?
- It is not clear whether data hosted in Australia by overseas companies is only subject to Australian law?
- Does the cloud service use https?
- Is data encrypted?
- Does the service provider offer backups to multiple server locations? Or is it cost prohibitive?
- Is it a better solution than a non-cloud based service?
- What does the user give up in order to use a free cloud-based service?
    For example, a gmail user accepts that google will advertise to them.
- Is the user of a cloud service aware of the privacy issues and who has access to their data? Is the service provider's privacy policy written in easy to understand language?
- Does the service provider adhere to common standards for accessibility options?
- Does the cloud-based service require a higher level of digital literacy than a similar non-cloud based service?

Other considerations

The choice to use cloud services involves weighing up the benefits with the potential risks. On the other hand, individuals and small businesses often do not have the resources to maintain their own proprietary systems and can save money by using free or relatively inexpensive subscription-based cloud services. They can also be a good solution for future expansion as they are often scalable.

One of our concerns with recommending cloud services for users in remote areas is that many of them simply do not work very well without a strong and reliable internet connection. Cloud services that have at least some ability to work offline are more desirable in this case.

Individuals and/or organisations concerned about the security of their data (or a cloud hosting provider having access to it) could run their own dedicated server - either on site or as a manual installation in an off-site data centre. However, this can be very costly and difficult to maintain.

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