



Build Your SMB in the Cloud – Top Four Cloud-Based Technologies Foster SMB Growth

What is the cloud and how does it relate to the SMB?

Amidst a plethora of IT trends, cloud computing has demonstrated true staying power with the SMB community, mainly due to its cost-effective environment with easy access from either the office, home or when on the road. Cloud computing has been around for years but with different names; historically, Cloud computing was referred to as Software as a Service or SaaS. The cloud has also become more than a sky community where SMBs can go to expand their businesses. It has become an integral part of the way modern-day small- to medium-sized businesses (SMBs) run their companies. At the helm of the cloud's appeal is the alluring ease with which the SMB can extend its IT capabilities — literally on the fly, without having to invest in new infrastructure or train new personnel.

The popularity of the cloud has reached well beyond its original roots in the telecommunications industry, where Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) were developed to consumer- and small business-based services such as Yahoo! Mail and Hotmail, which people have been using for years. In fact, according to a recent [Microsoft Cloud Survey](#), 39 percent of SMBs expect to pay for one or more cloud services within three years.

In recent years, large-scale, Internet-based storage has become less expensive and in return programmers have the ability to create more sophisticated remote software. People now have the ability to share and collaborate in much easier and more dynamic ways than before. With these technological advances readily available and accessible, entrepreneurs and SMBs are starting to tap into these cloud-based services to help manage, develop and grow their businesses. The [Microsoft report](#) further states that within three years, 43 percent of workloads will become paid cloud services.

With so many services available in the market, options can look a little foggy. To help demystify what's available, here are some examples within the top four emerging technologies that help SMBs successfully build their businesses in the cloud.

Solution #1 – Cloud-Based Data Storage and Sharing

- Egnyte offers a great solution to storage through its Cloud File Server. This server provides online file storage, file-sharing capabilities and computer backup for small, medium, and large enterprises. This is a great tool for SMBs to effectively store and share their file in the cloud.
- Box.net is a [cloud-based](#) content management solution for individuals and companies ranging from small businesses to large corporations. The company has adopted a "freemium" business model, and provides 5GB of free storage for personal accounts. A mobile version of the service is available for [iPhone](#), [iPad](#) and [Android](#) devices.

Solution #2 – Tap Into Talent via the Cloud

- oDesk is the marketplace for online work-teams, with a business model that benefits employers and contractors. Unlike other marketplaces, oDesk guarantees payment to employers and contractors. If you're looking for a company to take away the headaches of hiring, managing and paying, check out oDesk to help your SMB grow.
- LiveOps provides a best-in-class [on-demand contact center platform](#), as well as [call center outsourcing services](#) through its network of more than 20,000 independent at-home agents and hundreds of companies in [direct-response](#) and enterprise markets. In the direct-response market, LiveOps has gained the undisputed reputation as the best performing call center outsourcer, with 33 percent more revenue per campaign than traditional outsourcers.

Solution # 3 – General Business Apps

- Google Apps lets users access business and non-business applications and collaborate online. Many of the applications are free. It's ideal for virtual teams in smaller companies where manpower is spread out in separate locations. There are multiple plug-in apps with Google Apps that can extend its reach into invoicing, CAD design or location mapping. Outright is also a great resource for SMBs looking to take care of their taxes online. Outright's free online [bookkeeping](#) Web site is designed for smaller companies, with comparatively simple [taxes](#). They provide [applications](#) to manage general [accounting](#), taxes and some legal issues.
- Campaigner for e-mail marketing – J2 Global's Campaigner product line allows businesses to create e-mail campaigns from templates and easily mail them out to prospects and clients. The "Campaigner Free" version is free for the first 500 recipients. It's great for building a newsletter for repeat messaging.

Solution # 4 – Find New Business Leads Through Cloud-Based Marketplaces

- LinkedIn is a business-oriented [social networking site](#) containing more than 100 million members spanning 200 countries. LinkedIn is primarily a job board network and competes with Careerbuilder and Monster for sourcing and finding new hires. However, not only does LinkedIn help you find a job, it helps business

- professionals data-mine mid-manager prospects to understand where they fit in an organization.
- SaleSpider is the largest business social network specifically dedicated to SMBs and entrepreneurs around the world. What makes SaleSpider a hot spot for SMBs? Well first off, everyday, members of SaleSpider are connected with leads and opportunities. The network scours over 1 million job opportunities, 35,000 open government contracts, hundreds of thousands of classified ads, and its 800,000+ members receive unique business matching opportunities generated by keywords created by the member and the members' location. As of recent, the Web site also offers members-only discounts on business services in its [Hot Deals!](#) Section. In effect, it equips SMBs with new income-generating business leads and business networking connections that matter — all for free!

There is an abundance of cloud-based services available online, and as these technologies evolve, SMBs will continue to reap the rewards. By taking advantage of the cloud, small businesses can now effectively, efficiently and economically run and grow their companies.

Author: Russell Rothstein is the Founder and CEO of [SaleSpider](#), a business social network specifically geared for SMBs. SaleSpider features \$25 billion worth of qualified sales leads, networking with thousands of business professionals, classified ads and online tradeshows to users — for free. SaleSpider was launched in March 2006 and has since attracted over 790,000 members and is growing by 20,000 per month. Prior to the development of SaleSpider, Rothstein was the president and founder of NorthPath, a sales outsourcing company offering lead generation and field sales outsourcing to leading technology companies. Before joining NorthPath, Rothstein served in numerous sales and application capacities for Oracle, and was awarded Highest Performing Application Sales Manager. He was also the managing partner and founder of Bizware, a software supply chain for retail petroleum and major convenience stores, where he successfully built Bizware into the industry market leader before selling to a NASDAQ-listed public company in 1995

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