

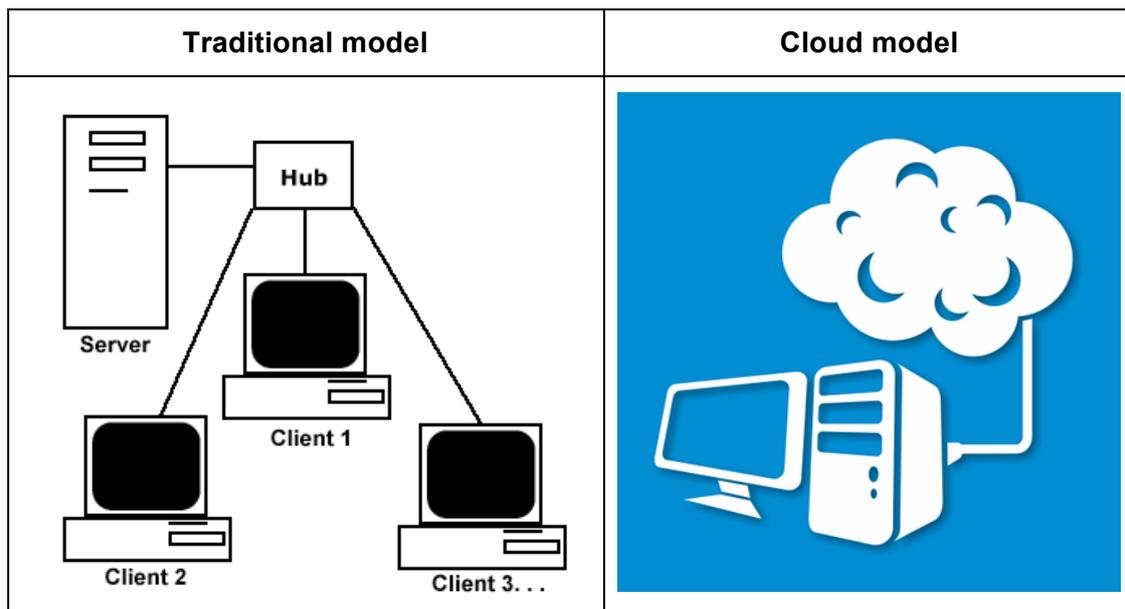
Cloud storage

A cloud storage service allows you to easily share files and to collaborate over the Internet. It is also another way to make sure that your files are backed up and easy to restore if needed.

What is cloud computing and storage?

Cloud computing is simply using computing resources that are delivered over the Internet. It is a way for organisations to take some or all of their existing IT infrastructure and operations and hand it over to someone else.

Cloud computer has been a bit of a paradigm shift, where IT is brought in modular units as an operational expense.



Cloud storage is basically your own hard drive on the Internet. It's where your computer data is located and managed over the Internet by a service provider. The cloud service provider offers managed data storage as a service to both individuals and organisations.

Why store your information online?

Many organisations have already moved away from storing data locally on their computers. Cloud storage options mean you don't have to buy or manage your own data storage infrastructure.

Here's why it's worth at least checking out cloud services.

1. Reduced costs – there are potential savings in equipment, software, IT infrastructure, maintenance, and support
2. Ease of use – saving and accessing files on the cloud may suit less technical staff members
3. Flexibility – you can scale up and down as your needs change
4. Automation – you can stop worrying about IT maintenance, upgrades and updates
5. Security – this may seem like heresy but it's a bit of an urban myth that onsite necessarily means more secure. Many onsite systems have security breaches or backup failures. Data security can be more reliable in the cloud because their security and backup systems are often far more sophisticated than onsite systems.

What are the issues?

The biggest issue with cloud storage essentially relates to trust. You need to be able to trust your remote service provider. Bear in mind that you are probably already storing data in the cloud if you are using social media such as Facebook, Flickr or Pinterest or by having a Gmail account.

Other risks to be aware of are:

- **Inconsistent** service delivery including a lack of connection if the Internet is down or if you are in an area where this is no Internet connection
- **Inadequate** disaster recovery or continuity plans
- **Ramifications** if the provider is purchased by another company.

Basic checklist

This cloud checklist outlines the things you should know about a potential cloud service provider.

- **Pricing** – You need to ask about the setup fees and usage charges. This will help you decide whether it is worth moving to the cloud.
- **Availability** – You need to ask what the guaranteed uptime is. For example, Google offers guaranteed 99.9% operational time – apparently.
- **Data storage** – First you need to consider how sensitive your data is. Then find out where the cloud servers are located; what encryption methods are used to secure the data; who has access to your data in the data centre, and what the backup / disaster processes are.
- **Performance and scaling** – Ask about the server specifications in terms of RAM, processors and disks, etc; how soon you can get started; then make sure you can scale up and down according to your own requirements.

- **Termination clauses** – Find out if you can terminate the contract at any time without penalty; particularly if there is a security breach or other tenuous circumstances. Ask on what grounds the provider can terminate your contract. And when your data will be returned after termination.
- **Support** – Is support available 24/7? What support channels are available to you (phone/email/Web-based chat)? How helpful is the customer help desk? Can the provider help your staff handle simple issues?

Popular storage services

The most popular cloud storage services are Google Drive and Dropbox. Here we will take a closer look at Dropbox.

What is Dropbox?

Dropbox is a virtual folder that sits in the cloud. It may be a personal folder or a business folder. This folder and its contents are made available to you on your own computer as well as on any other devices you have.

Dropbox makes your files accessible from almost anywhere. It's a simple way to store and share files.

If you are using more than one computer or device, simply install the Dropbox app on each.



The Dropbox folders will synchronise automatically and you will have the same files on each computer. You just need to use the same Dropbox login.

How to install Dropbox

To install Dropbox, go to the Dropbox download page. Install the Dropbox app on all of your computers and mobile devices.

Once it's installed, you'll see a Dropbox folder on your hard drive.

Put your files in your Dropbox folder and it will automatically upload and be available on all your computer, phone, tablet devices through the syncing process.



How to use Dropbox

After you install and connect to the Dropbox server, it becomes like any folder on your computer. You can drag and drop to move files around. Files or folders uploaded to the Dropbox folder are immediately synchronized to the Dropbox server.

If you are using a PC, a Dropbox folder will be created under your 'Documents' folder, which makes it as easy to use as Windows Explorer.

It also keeps track of any changes made and these changes are instantly updated to all computers linked to the account. Whatever you drop into your Dropbox folder is automatically uploaded to your Dropbox account.

If you need to work with others:

- Create a project folder
- Share it with your co-workers
- Send them an invitation to access your project's shared folder
- Starting working together

Dropbox web interface

If you do not have access to your own computers, you can use Dropbox's web interface to access your files.

This interface remembers all the changes made to your files and allows you to restore to any previous versions of the file. You can even un-delete files that you may have accidentally erased. This feature came in very handy for us recently.

You can access your Dropbox files via the web only but to take full advantage of the syncing feature, it's best to install the Dropbox app on all your devices (computers, laptops, mobiles).

What does it cost?

Dropbox Basic comes with 2GB of space and is free. If you want more space or features, you need to upgrade a paid version.

Need help?

Dropbox has a help centre here: <https://www.dropbox.com/help>