

Cloud Computing Is no Longer Your Practice's Future, It's Here Now

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With the advent of cloud computing, practices are now able to have better access to their data; using any platform, any device, and at anytime.

Source: Physicians Practice

You may not realize it, but the nature of a computer application has changed over the past decade. For years, the only way to get an application onto your computer was to acquire a disk and install it from the disk drive. Obviously the Internet changed how the application/program is delivered to you, but that's not the biggest shift. The fact that most applications don't even run on your computer is a much more significant change.

Very few applications are installed directly on a computer anymore. You probably have a Web browser installed and maybe iTunes or photo management software, but most applications have moved to a Web interface, with both the application and the data it uses stored on the Internet — or as it's now often called, "the cloud". Even the king of all application suites, Microsoft Office, is making the big shift to being accessed and run from the cloud. Outlook has long offered a Web-based interface, but the newest versions of quintessential business applications like Excel and Word now include the option of running the programs in a Web browser.

Running an application from the cloud offers many benefits. It offers the flexibility of being able to run on different platforms (a webpage looks the same on both Windows and Apple operating systems), different devices (like your Windows desktop computer or iPad), and the information is available anytime you have access to the Internet. Depending on the system, doctors have the potential to access medical records from home (or on vacation); call centers can be set up without the expensive prospect of setting up a new Wide Area Network connection to the main office; and the patient portal can be configured without the need to open up new access to your network.

Very few EHR systems are cloud-based today. The vast majority are client server, which means your data lives on a server in one of your physical locations. Software is installed on each computer or runs from a thin client, a computer which accesses it's applications from another system. Cloud-based EHRs are beginning to receive more attention, however. The most recent KLAS report ranks cloud-based systems near the top, or at the top, in a number of categories.

If you are considering a new EHR, include at least one cloud-based system in your selection process. Seeing a demo will, at the very least, give you a good idea about how EHRs will look in the future.

Cloud-based storage

Practices that don't have a browser-based EHR are still leveraging the benefits of the cloud. Medical groups are learning that storing data in data centers allows them to recover the space taken by server rooms and servers, as well as the electrical and HVAC costs of maintaining them. Knowing that your important (often mission-critical) data is safe and secure in a data center doesn't hurt either.

In recent years, data speeds and security have improved to the point where data hosted on the Internet is almost as fast and secure as the information hosted "in-house." This progress has allowed medical practices to re-evaluate their technology needs.

Many practice administrators still find it difficult to maintain their data centers outside of their own walls. When selecting a vendor partner to host your data, you'll want to do extra homework in making sure they are a trustworthy company. Contact their references to see if they experience any

lag time (slow speeds) when accessing their data. Security is obviously vital for this information, so have an IT expert and your legal representative review the contract, to mitigate your risks, before you sign anything.

Cloud adoption is part of an evolutionary chain that began when data was stored on a computer. It wasn't long before storage moved to a server, which allowed more computers to access the same information, at the same time. Now, the servers are moving to the cloud, which allows access from anywhere on the Internet. If you are not leveraging the many benefits the cloud has to offer, you are missing out on some great tools to help you run your practice.

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