

# Cloud Solutions for Microsoft Dynamics Users

White Paper

## Executive Summary

Cloud software solutions can streamline business processes for Microsoft Dynamics users while cutting both costs and maintenance effort. Cloud solutions take three forms: public, private, and hybrid. Depending on corporate policy and specific security concerns, they might not all fit the specifications of a given company. It is therefore important to determine the most important functionality that a cloud solution can provide, and to choose accordingly. It is also important to carefully consider a vendor and to choose one that can provide a solution that makes the most sense given a company's requirements.

**Always contact a vendor before making a selection to discuss specific needs.**

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Cloud solutions for Microsoft Dynamics provide a distinct alternative to self-hosted software. Businesses, particularly those with established self-maintained systems, may be curious as to what these offerings look like. Because Microsoft Dynamics now integrates with and offers cloud-based programs, it is worthwhile to explore the potential for increased functionality and lower up-front costs that these models can offer. It is important to remember that, although cloud solutions present unique security concerns, they are not necessarily more expensive or difficult to manage than traditional self-hosted systems.

## How Do Cloud Solutions Vary?

There are three forms that cloud solutions can take for Microsoft Dynamics users. At first glance, this variation can seem confusing. This need not be the case, though it must be said that cloud configurations will often be unique to a specific company's needs. The three basic forms are: private clouds, public clouds, and hybrid clouds. Each offers distinct advantages and challenges for the buyer.

### Public Clouds

When executives think of cloud solutions, they most often envision the public cloud. Numerous applications, whether they are web-based or installed on a computer or smartphone, take advantage of public cloud technology. Essentially, user data is held on an external server, meaning that they can theoretically access it from any web-enabled device. This might be application-specific data, or simply general data that users wish to use on a variety of devices in different locations.

For Dynamics users, public clouds represent the most diverse benefits of cloud storage. When Microsoft or an affiliate manages data on their own servers, businesses generally encounter significantly lower upfront costs compared to other cloud solutions and traditional self-installations. Further, the turnaround time for implementation is minimal since the program is already loaded on the server.

### Private Clouds

Private clouds are often most attractive to large companies with established software protocols. As the name suggests, these "clouds" are only accessible to internal employees and contractors. The company's IT department is responsible for the installation and subsequent management of the solution. Because private clouds lack the simplicity and flexibility of public clouds they are best suited to more simple tasks such as internal data retrieval.

The primary advantage as well as disadvantage of private clouds is that they are governed by the security systems of the business itself, not those of a third party. While some businesses will be more comfortable with this setup, it is important to remember that third-party security systems are often very robust since the livelihood of those businesses depends on data integrity. Still, if it is necessary to keep data under one roof, then private clouds can offer some of the advantages of cloud architecture to enterprise-level businesses.

## Hybrid Clouds

Hybrid clouds provide some elements of both public and private clouds to offer some flexibility while retaining full control of important data. Due to their inherently modular nature, hybrid clouds are the least clearly defined of the cloud storage forms. Businesses will often work directly with software service providers to configure a custom solution. One popular option allows for the generation of temporary clouds for relief of sudden increases in server traffic. This type of safety net solution weighs more heavily on the utility of clouds rather than their storage capabilities, and represents a creative use of the medium.

Another popular configuration for Dynamics users in particular involves deploying different software from the same provider both in the cloud and on-premise. For instance, a Dynamics user might institute both cloud CRM software and onsite ERP. This allows for an integrated solution that still keeps some sensitive data out of the externally-managed cloud.

Again, it is important to remember that onsite data storage does not necessarily indicate greater security. In addition, by their variable nature cloud solutions can present greater complications than pure public or private clouds and require greater end user training. Finally, assuming a third-party vendor does have a security breach, data corruption could still potentially affect company servers if the integration is configured poorly.

## Choosing a Solution

Ultimately, the choice of configuration will come down to standing corporate policy and individual need. That being said, from a purely objective standpoint, the public cloud options provide the greatest functionality for the least cost. They also save time and effort because they require substantially less configuration than the other cloud options. Regardless of choice, it is always important for a company to contact a vendor before making a selection to discuss specific needs and to determine which, if any, cloud solutions will be right for their business.

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