



# Emerging Public Cloud Will Change How We Use Information

You want access to the electronic files you need to perform your job day in and day out, whether in the office, on the road, or at home. So you copy larger files, or entire folders, to USB flash drives for access on your laptop; you e-mail yourself smaller files, so that you can access them later from your work Web mail account; and, just in case of a technical apocalypse, you carry with you paper copies of the most critical files.

by Jill Gilbert

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What's wrong with this picture? This scenario triggers several concerns. First, information security. The typical file copied to a USB flash drive is not encrypted or password-protected. Just about anyone can open and view the information. Similarly, one shudders at the thought of those paper copies becoming misplaced and getting into the wrong hands.

Second, version control. Any changes you make to your files are not automatically synced with the document management system at work. Multiple versions can cause quite a headache to decipher who made which changes, and when. In addition, lack of version control leads to a breakdown in data transparency and auditability, as well as leaving the organization open to e-discovery risk.

Third, sharing and accessibility. If you have files squirreled away for safekeeping, then the latest version of that information is not available when others need it to make informed business decisions.

## A New Ecosystem

Most likely, you have heard about corporate use of the Cloud—a way to deliver software and services via the Internet rather than storing software or data on a local computer. Corporations and other large organizations use the Cloud to balance information traffic and store information securely (see “A Sunny Outlook for Cloud Computing,” *EM* July 2010, page 36). Now, a new ecosystem called the “Personal Cloud” is emerging to address the existing personal computing experience, characterized by information scattered across PCs, mobile devices, and online services.

According to IT firm Forrester Research, “The Personal Cloud will dramatically transform market opportunities for Web properties, PC makers, OS providers, mobile device manufacturers, ISPs and telcos, and enterprise software vendors.”<sup>1</sup> The Personal Cloud could become a \$12 billion market in five years. Cloud technology advances make it affordable to keep files accessible—and synced—on various devices in the Cloud. “The market for synchronization is growing as users increasingly blur the lines between their personal and work-related equipment, including PCs, laptops, tablets like the iPad, phones, and audio and video players.”<sup>2</sup>

Market leaders include a number of familiar names like Apple, Microsoft, Google, and Amazon, companies that already have a stake in the business and/or consumer Cloud markets. You may not be quite as familiar with companies like DropBox, SugarSync, and Box.net.

The Personal Cloud will change how we interact with electronic information:

- Shift from device-centric to information centric.
- Automatically push files to different devices.
- Subsidized or free subscriptions.



## Game Changer

The Personal Cloud will change how we interact with electronic information. For the past 10 years, the PC has been our central hub. We required electronic cables to transfer data from one peripheral device to another. Most of us have a drawer full of different cables for our smartphones, personal digital assistants, external hard drives, music players, and digital cameras.

The Personal Cloud shifts the focus away from a device—the PC—to information. How? By using the Internet to backup and synchronize multiple devices. In June, Apple announced at its Worldwide Developer Conference that its iCloud service, to debut this fall, will sync multiple devices wirelessly, without the need for cables. New software applications will automatically push files to different devices, so that one user can see the same version of files, no matter what device s/he uses. Envision starting on a report or presentation at the office, making last-minute edits on your tablet or iPad at home that evening, and sharing the information with colleagues over lunch, on your smartphone.

You can get a free or subsidized Personal Cloud account through one of the major providers. Free accounts with DropBox, SugarSync, and Windows LiveMesh (Beta) permit 2–5 GB of data storage. Apple will discontinue paid MobileMe subscriptions when it launches iCloud this fall; Apple device owners will be eligible for 5 GB of free storage, not counting photos and music libraries. Most Personal Cloud services offer additional storage and multi-user business plans for a fee.

## Features and Benefits

### Features

The Personal Cloud encompasses much more than user-directed online file backup. New companies entering the Personal Cloud market offer automatic

backup, file sync, and more, across a multitude of devices and operating systems. Key features include:

- **Backup**—all services offer file backup and recovery; some offer the ability to backup any folder on your computer, real-time upload of changes, and the ability to restore a particular version.
- **Sync with multiple devices**—some services allow syncing with multiple computers and/or multiple devices.
- **Remote access**—ability to access files from a Web browser, and, in some cases, peer-to-peer file sharing.
- **Sharing/collaboration**—ability to share folders and send files of any size. Some services allow password-protected folder sharing.
- **Media**—store and share photos, music, and video.
- **Mobile**—different Personal Cloud services support various smartphones and tablets.
- **Platforms**—most services support Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7, and Mac OSX; some support Linux and other operating systems.
- **International**—some services support multiple languages.

### Benefits

The Personal Cloud provides a secure conduit for sharing files, including file encryption. Another benefit is the ability to collaborate. A Personal Cloud user can invite another person to share a folder. The other person sees only that folder. Perhaps the greatest benefit is the ability of some Personal Cloud services to automatically “push” files to different devices without user intervention, wirelessly.

The Personal Cloud is a game changer, allowing us to focus on information, not hardware. This emerging technology, and its extension into the business world, is another example of how lines between work life and personal life continue to blur. **em**

The Personal Cloud shifts the focus away from a device to information.

## References

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