

Cloud Vs On-Premise

A Unique Decision
For Every Law Firm

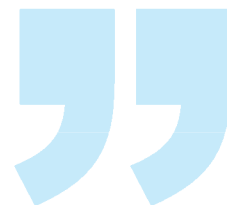


If I could give one piece of advice to a firm considering moving to the cloud it would be do it, but choose your technology partner carefully!

**Douglas MacDuff, Solicitor,
SILVER FITZGERALD**

At the moment, because of our size, we are keeping our conventional servers. But in the future everyone will be on the cloud and Select Legal are leading the way.

**Rupert Hawke, Managing Director,
CARTWRIGHT KING**



PRACTICAL CHECKLIST FOR LAW FIRMS

- Cloud Computing Defined
- Is Your Internet Connection Up To The Job?
- Data Security & Client Confidentiality
- Backing Up Your Data
- Costs Considerations & Protecting Existing Investments
- Your People & Their Skills
- Other Key Software Products
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Like many senior people at law firms today, you could well be considering the merits of cloud computing. As cloud computing picks up momentum globally across all industries, not just the legal profession, hype is rife, scaremongering is plentiful and debate is healthy. For some law firms it appears that the cloud offers a very attractive silver lining, whilst for others an on-premise infrastructure seems to fit their needs better. The fact of the matter is – this is a unique decision for every law firm.



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Select Legal Systems is a specialist software supplier to the legal profession offering both cloud and on-premise options with hundreds of satisfied users in both camps relying on their flagship product, LAWFUSION, to run and grow their businesses. To help you decide between cloud and on-premise Select Legal Systems has produced this practical checklist for law firms considering a move to the cloud. It should be read in conjunction with Select's video which features interviews with 4 law firms - all users of LAWFUSION - talking about their experiences with the cloud vs on-premise dilemma.

[View the video now at www.selectlegal.co.uk](http://www.selectlegal.co.uk)

Cloud Computing Defined

Of course cloud computing as such i.e. the provision of computing services over the internet, is nothing new. Remote application hosting has been available for many years.

Cloud computing, in the context of this checklist, is simply outsourcing the hosting of your accounts, case and practice management software along with the other key integrated third-party software products, such as Microsoft Office and Exchange. Do you host them on your own inhouse servers or do you entrust the hosting of your systems to a cloud technology partner?

The software doesn't change – the only differences are how you access it and where it is hosted. The software functionality is exactly the same whether you have LAWFUSION on-premise or on the cloud.

Is Your Internet Connection Up To The Job?

This has to be your first consideration if you are planning a move to the cloud.

If there is no tick in this box, the rest of this check-list is irrelevant.

Most law firms today rely on the Internet to gather information, but when it comes to hosting your entire business systems on the cloud it is a very different ball game. A move to the cloud means your internet connection becomes your most important business utility, and must be measured in terms of its capacity to meet the demands of your firm.

This often depends on the physical location of your premises. Commercial broadband infrastructure providers simply have no plans to invest in certain rural areas.





The Government has a programme to put this right aiming to have a digital hub in every community in the country, as part of an £830 million strategy to make sure the UK has the best broadband network in Europe by 2015.

Investigate the services available in your area and be sure you can get a reliable internet connection that is up to the job.

When using the cloud, everything you do is being sent and received across your Internet connection, so you must consider not only the size of your practice, but also the kind of law you practise. If you deal with a lot of document printing and scanning, these print and scan jobs are sent and received to and from the cloud across the Internet. If you do not have a connection that can deal with your users browsing, printing and scanning, you can find that operations run too slowly which can affect productivity significantly.

If you are in conveyancing you may handle large files, perhaps needing to scan and print detailed building plots and plans etc. which will require decent upload/download speeds. However, if you specialise in personal injury for say RTA (road traffic accidents) claims then we would expect your file sizes to be considerably smaller and not so demanding on the connection.

This is possibly the most important consideration when moving to the cloud. You will have to look at service level agreements with your Internet Service Providers and consider what you would/could do if your connection went down. The experienced team at Select can help and advise you on this.

Data Security & Client Confidentiality

There are not many industries you can name where data security and client confidentiality are deemed more serious than in the legal profession. It is overwhelmingly clear that security has been the main concern for the legal profession in their move to embrace cloud computing and it has been perceived as a barrier for many. Some law firms it seems are more comfortable looking after their own data, whilst others have found that worries about security are not insurmountable. Choosing the right IT partner is clearly a critical decision in order to achieve peace of mind.

The decision to hold the firm's confidential data on your own on-premise servers or with a trusted supplier on the cloud is a major one for every firm. It is a decision that must be based entirely on what makes you and your firm's stakeholders feel most comfortable.

This is a key factor for any law firm making the cloud vs on-premise decision and Select Legal can discuss this in detail with you and help you make the right decision for your Practice.



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Backing Up Your Data

Backing up your firm's data is a huge responsibility. With an on-premise infrastructure this usually falls upon someone within the Practice. You will need to put a procedure in place to ensure a data backup is taken and checked daily and you must consider the ability to restore files easily when required. The person responsible must have a deputy standing by to take care of this important task when they are away or ill, and the daily backup must be taken offsite in case of a fire. All these things are normally managed for you when you use a cloud based solution.

Some law firms feel more in control if they are in charge of backing up and checking their own data. Others will feel happier delegating back up procedures to a trusted technology partner. The team at Select Legal can help you make the best decision for your unique situation. We can discuss and demonstrate to you the recommended standards for ISO certified data centres, safe harbour locations and military grade encryption security.



Costs Considerations & Protecting Existing Investments

Do you need to protect existing investments in your inhouse infrastructure? Or is your hardware approaching the end of its life?

Servers are expensive and you need to get a decent return on your investment. Typically a good quality server should last up to 5 years. They are expensive to replace, in terms of capital outlay, and require regular maintenance to make sure they perform at an optimum level.

If your servers still have life in them, then it's probably better to protect the investment you have made and stick with an on-premise infrastructure for now. However, if your servers are approaching end of life you ought to consider a cloud solution.

Some law firms are clearly benefiting from the switch from up front capital investment to a regular, competitive, monthly fee for a hosted solution. But depending on the age and condition of your server hardware, you may be better advised to protect your existing investment for the time being.

Regardless of which option you go for, of course, you are still going to have some hardware on site. E.g. your PCs, printers, scanners etc. With a cloud solution, it is normally only your servers that will be based elsewhere and you will access them over a secure internet connection. With an on-premise solution, to run the latest versions of software, you may need to factor in an upgrade of your PCs to support the use of say Microsoft Office etc. On the cloud however, you don't need to worry about this, because none of this software is ever installed onto your computers. Your PCs will simply be used to connect, nothing more. For this reason, cloud is proving popular with many law firms because they can run their businesses with cutting edge software even when their PCs have seen better days, and without large capital investments.

Another consideration for those who opt for an on-premise infrastructure, is that upgrading third party software such as Microsoft Office can be expensive. Not only in terms of the cost of moving from one version to another, but also the actual process of upgrading can be cumbersome and time consuming, not to mention the regular installation of service packs. With a cloud set up, from some suppliers, law firms can expect software upgrades of this nature to happen automatically as part of the hosted service.



Smaller law firms have certainly led the way with the adoption of cloud computing quickly taking advantage of its many cost-saving benefits. Whilst many larger, more established firms, who have already invested significantly in their own IT infrastructure are still managing their IT on-premise. However, we are seeing the 'size of firm' threshold shifting as firms of all sizes are beginning to embrace cloud computing.

Select Legal offers a free cost-benefit analysis so you can clearly see all the facts and make the right decision.

Your People & Their Skills

You may have good people inhouse managing your IT that you wish to retain. That being said, these good people could be invaluable to you in a different role – i.e. a planning role perhaps. Rather than providing hands on technical support for your users day to day, perhaps they have the skills to guide you through upcoming decisions as the shape of IT continues to change rapidly.

If you would rather concentrate on practising law and spend your wage bill on people with legal skills rather than IT skills, outsourcing your IT to a trusted cloud technology partner could be a more cost effective option for you.

However, it is worth noting at this point, that you will still need technical support for the day to day hardware at your premises – your PCs, printers and scanners etc. This of course can be handled internally by your own IT staff or outsourced to a local support partner.

The calibre of IT people needed to support system servers is much higher in terms of experience and skills because the risk is far greater than for those simply supporting your end users with their everyday PCs and printers etc.

Other Key Software Products

With a cloud option, for a monthly fee you can expect to get a full suite of practice management software as well as fully integrated Microsoft Office and Exchange products – all hosted on the cloud. This is certainly the case with LAWFUSION Direct, Select's cloud option. This scenario means you do not have to think about keeping track of old versions, upgrading etc. it is all taken care of for you and upgrades happen automatically.

With an on-premise option – the firm itself owns the software licences and with this comes the responsibility to track them to stay legal and upgrade them, which in some cases can mean a significant investment. Also,

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because big software players like Microsoft are pushing cloud as part of their business strategies, their current pricing models make it quite attractive to move to cloud with Office and Exchange. However, in reality we find many firms make their on-premise software licences last as long as possible, running old versions because they still work and upgrade costs are significant.

There are other key products you can have integrated with LAWFUSION, running on the cloud, such as Digital Dictation, Legal Forms Packages and Client ID Verification Software. Of course we can help and advise you on this.

Disaster Recovery

When disaster strikes you have to be prepared for every eventuality and this is no different whether you are on the cloud or on-premise. You need a solid disaster recovery plan either way. The only difference is where the responsibility lies in getting you up and running again as quickly as possible.

Obviously with the inhouse control of an on-premise infrastructure the responsibility lies within the firm and some Partners prefer to have this kind of control. With a cloud set up you are entrusting this responsibility to your chosen technology partner. This is why it is imperative you choose a partner you can rely upon absolutely.

When using a cloud provider your only real points of failure are; a) power within your own premises and b) your internet connection from your Internet Service Provider. You should consider what impact losing these would have and what steps could be taken.

Most plans protect against power loss, but do not deal with hardware component or software failures. To combat these issues, Select Legal Systems uses advanced virtualisation technology. Virtualisation allows hardware to be shared between systems, and provides an environment where clones of systems can be brought online in moments in the event of a software or hardware failure. The costs of virtualisation are relatively high and whilst it may prove cost effective for some very large firms, virtualisation is standard with the right cloud provider.

Mobility

Many people think excellent mobility, i.e. the ability to work on your system from anywhere in the world is best achieved via a cloud set up. This however, is a myth. You can have excellent mobility with an on-premise infrastructure too as many LAWFUSION users do. Don't let your need to work remotely colour your decision when you are choosing between cloud and on-premise. It is available either way.

For high levels of mobility with your on-premise infrastructure, there is much that can be done, but it is worth bearing in mind that without the right levels of know-how you can easily create potential security breaches or invalidate your insurance cover. Speak to Select about your mobility and remote working needs for best advice.

Scalability

Whether a firm is on the cloud or not, in the ever-changing legal marketplace scalability is a key consideration. Particularly for firms that are keen to expand, merge with others or planning to combine their branches or departments.

Either way LAWFUSION will scale up or down with the business as required. However the benefit of the cloud is the pricing model. Because it is a rental based system, you pay according to current needs.

For Example, an on-premise firm may spend £30,000 on an in-house system for 20 staff, but later decrease the team by 5 people. They cannot 'claw back' that investment made for those 5 users. Similarly, they may buy servers to accommodate 20 users, but as they grow and the size of their team increases at some point they will need a costly hardware upgrade. On the cloud, it is far easier and immediate to add and shed users as your business changes.

Through 20+ years experience helping law firms, Select Legal can provide solid advice on scalability.

Hybrid Options

Some firms choose to have a hybrid set up with some elements of their technology hosted on-premise whilst other elements are outsourced to a cloud provider. E.g a number of LAWFUSION clients have outsourced their e-mail systems to a cloud provider, but still use LAWFUSION on their local PCs. Others have a backup of their data held on the cloud, as a disaster recovery option.

You may wish to migrate over to cloud computing gradually and, if so, starting in this way could be a sensible option.

The experienced team at Select Legal are happy to discuss and explore possibilities with you depending on your unique needs.



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Look To The Future

You only have to look at the global IT world generally to see that cloud has well and truly arrived whether any of us like it or not. For many of the big players it is evident that cloud forms a major part of their strategy for the future – e.g. Microsoft, Adobe, VMWare, Google, Amazon etc.

The consensus of opinion, for the legal profession is that cloud will overtake on-premise in the next 10 perhaps 15 years. There is no doubt that a move from server based applications to cloud computing is providing law firms with flexibility, agility and convenience in an increasingly mobile world, making cloud computing more and more appealing to large and small firms alike.

Where are you heading with your IT? Where do you want to be in terms of IT infrastructure in the next 5-10 years? What is the age and condition of your current servers?

Legal technologies experts are available from Select Legal Systems to discuss your particular infrastructure plans and needs.

Case Studies

For a selection of LAWFUSION case studies – please visit www.selectlegal.co.uk.

For a Demonstration

To book a LAWFUSION demonstration –please call 01482 567601 now or visit www.selectlegal.co.uk.

For LAWFUSION Pricing

For LAWFUSION Pricing – please call Select Sales on 01482 567601



Select Legal Systems Limited
Priory Court, Saxon Way, Hessle, HU13 9PB
T: 01482 567601 E: sales@selectlegal.co.uk W: www.selectlegal.co.uk
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