You cannot be cirrus: why some clouds are a joke

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Thanks to their £30m supercomputer, the Met Office was able to predict accurately the size and path of the St Jude storm in October 2013 before the storm had even formed (Prynne, 2013).

It did so by collecting data from millions of collection points around the globe, filtering this data through a million lines of code, backed up by the laws of physics and 150 years of experience, and using a computer capable of 100,000,000,000,000 calculations every second. (To put this last number into context, the same number of kilometres is equivalent to over ten light years.)

But for centuries supercomputerless farmers, fishermen and folklore have used clouds to predict the weather: cirrus (thin and wispy) means stormy weather is on the way; cirrocumulus (long rows of small, white, rounded puffs) means fair but cold weather; cumulonimbus (mountains of dense clouds) means heavy, possibly thundery, showers; cirrostratus (sheet like clouds covering the entire sky) means rain/snow within a day, and so on (Readers Digest, 2013).

So whereas to the uninitiated a cloud is a cloud is a cloud, to those in the know there are many different types, and each has a purpose.

It's the same when people talk about "the cloud" as though it's a generic, amorphous, virtually-grey mass. But actually there are many different types of cloud.

For example, you can have a private cloud where all of the infrastructure is dedicated solely to your organisation, providing you with a high degree of control and security. You can even host and operate it yourself if you want.

You can have a public cloud where you share the infrastructure with others and access it only over the internet. Although accreditation to a high level is possible, some organisations see security as an issue.

Or you can have a community cloud where multiple clouds are used by a community of organisations for a shared purpose. This sort of cloud needs a trusted domain sharing security, service and jurisdiction requirements.

Continued overleaf.

Focus

How cloud-based solutions can hep you.

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To be able to forecast accurately what type of cloud is right for you, you need to talk to experts. They'll help you to articulate your requirements and find the right solution, or combination of solutions. Find someone with a long track-record of providing secure infrastructure services (after all, the cloud is just the latest way of delivering services) and the right accreditations. And if security is an issue for you, make sure your potential provider has the right clearances.

Like Joni Mitchell, you can look at clouds from both sides now.

Prynne M. (28 October 2013) Met Office supercomputer mapped storm long before it had formed [online] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/weather/10408452/Met-Office-supercomputer-mapped-storm-long-before-it-had-formed.html (Accessed 25 November 2013)

Readers Digest (2013) How to Predict the Weather [online] http://www.rd.com/slideshows/how-to-predict-the-weather/ (Accessed 25 November 2013)