

CLOSING CASE STUDY ONE

Public “Personal” Clouds

Cloud computing is not solely focused on helping organizations better manage their investments in IT infrastructure and have access to scalable IT resources in real-time. The cloud has gone “personal,” and there are now a wide range of cloud services for just you as an individual. Three companies offering personal cloud services are Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft.

AMAZON

Amazon is definitely the retail giant of the Web, but even it concedes that its market share in the digital services space is “insignificant” compared to that of Apple. So, Amazon has launched a series of personal cloud services in the hope of stealing away many of Apple’s customers. One such cloud service is *Amazon Cloud Drive*. Cloud Drive is an external hard disk for your computer (or tablet PC or smartphone) in the cloud. On it, you can store music, photos, videos, and documents. With any Web browser, you can access all your digital assets on Cloud Drive.

You can load your music onto Cloud Drive in one of two ways. First, when you buy digital music at Amazon’s MP3 store, you can have that music automatically loaded into your Cloud Drive space. Second, if you currently have music on your laptop or desktop (even if that music comes from iTunes), you can upload that with a few clicks. It’s also similarly easy to upload any of your other digital assets—photos, videos, or documents.

Amazon provides you with a limited amount of free space on your Cloud Drive, somewhere in the range of 5 to 10Gb. Even better, if you buy music from Amazon’s MP3 store, it doesn’t count against your free limit. If you exceed your limit with other content—photos, videos, or documents or perhaps music from some organization other than Amazon—you can buy additional storage space, which will cost approximately \$1 per year per Gb. (A Gb of storage typically holds about 200 to 250 songs, depending on their length and quality.)

APPLE

Partly in response to Amazon’s move, Apple also announced a personal cloud service called *iCloud*. iCloud is completely free, no matter how much content

you store in it. iCloud is different from Amazon’s Cloud Drive in that it is built into the normal workings of Apple computers and mobile devices. When you take a photo using your iPhone, for example, that photo will be available on your Mac or iPad within a few seconds. So, whenever you create and store a document on your Mac, you are also automatically storing it in iCloud. That means you can then view and change the document on your iPad without first having to transfer the file from your Mac to your iPad.

The iCloud constantly synchronizes all your Apple digital assets, including music, photos, videos, documents, calendar, contacts, and mail across all your Apple devices. The goal is to encourage you to buy only Apple devices (a Mac, an iPad, and an iPhone) because they all remain synchronized without your ever having to do anything. And what happens when you buy a new iPhone? Just enter your ID and password and you will be instantly connected to your *iCloud* space, giving you access to everything you have.

MICROSOFT

It makes obvious sense that Microsoft would also be in this space. Microsoft is still the dominant provider of personal productivity software (Microsoft Office) and personal operating system software (Windows XP and Windows 7, mainly). To maintain its dominance, not lose market share, and hopefully gain market share, Microsoft offers *Windows Live*, personal cloud space for its users. Windows Live offers free storage space in SkyDrive, where you can upload any of your digital assets. If you own multiple Windows-based machines, SkyDrive can help you keep your digital assets on those machines always in sync. And like iCloud, Windows Live will also synchronize your calendar, contacts, and e-mail across your Windows devices.

Windows Live allows you to create groups in your cloud space, so you can collaborate with other people on documents and projects. That feature is much easier to use while collaborating as opposed to e-mailing documents to other people, trying to keep track of changes and versions, and attempting to determine who made what changes and the order in which the changes were made.^{10, 11, 12}

Questions

1. Do some research on Amazon's Cloud Drive. What is the amount of free storage space? What is the annual cost for additional storage? What about Apple's iCloud? Is it still free? Does Microsoft charge anything for use of its SkyDrive cloud service?
2. Putting all your personal information in the cloud means letting go of some control over information like your tax files, personal photos that you might not want anyone else to see, term papers you're currently writing, and so on. What is your level of concern for the security of these personal digital assets in the cloud? Explain why your level of concern is high or low.
3. As we move more of our personal storage needs to the cloud, will computers really need disk storage space? Is it possible that we're in the early stages of an outrageous industry transformation? Who are the major manufacturers of disk storage for personal computers and laptops?
4. If you choose to store all your personal information in the cloud, you'll need a *personal continuity plan*, much like organizations have business continuity plans in case of some sort of disaster. Suppose that right now you begin storing all your personal information only in the cloud. Of that information, what will you also back up onto a flash drive? How often would you perform the back up process? How often do you currently back up information on your computer's hard drive?
5. Do some research on personal cloud providers. What sort of service level agreement (SLA) do they offer? Are you willing to store your information with a personal cloud provider that offers no SLA? Why or why not?