

eBook

# Choosing the Right Cloud Provider for Your Business

Learn About Six Key Factors to Consider in Your Decision-Making Process





By now, the benefits of cloud computing are well known. Reduced capital expenditures. On-demand scalability. Flexible access to applications. The question for organizations today is not whether to move to the cloud, but how to determine which cloud provider is the best fit. Or, perhaps more importantly, as multi-cloud strategies gain momentum, what is the right mix of cloud providers and platforms?

While there are many considerations when evaluating cloud providers, the most important ones are not always mired in the technical details. To help you get started, here are six key factors to consider in your decision-making process. Ultimately, this is not about eliminating cloud providers that are wrong, but rather, identifying the right path to the cloud for your business.

# #1: Take Your Preferences into Account

It's natural that you or members of your team will hold strong opinions about certain cloud providers, both positive and negative. Perhaps you had a great experience at your last job with one provider, or there was a licensing issue or technology limitation that held you back. These experiences may be highly biased and personal, but they should be considered as part of any comprehensive, data-driven cloud assessment.

As noted by Harvard Business School, "While intuition can provide a hunch or spark that starts you down a particular path, it's through data that you verify, understand and quantify."<sup>1</sup> Past preferences should provide that path for you to evaluate whether they are based on misinformation or if there is an element of truth.

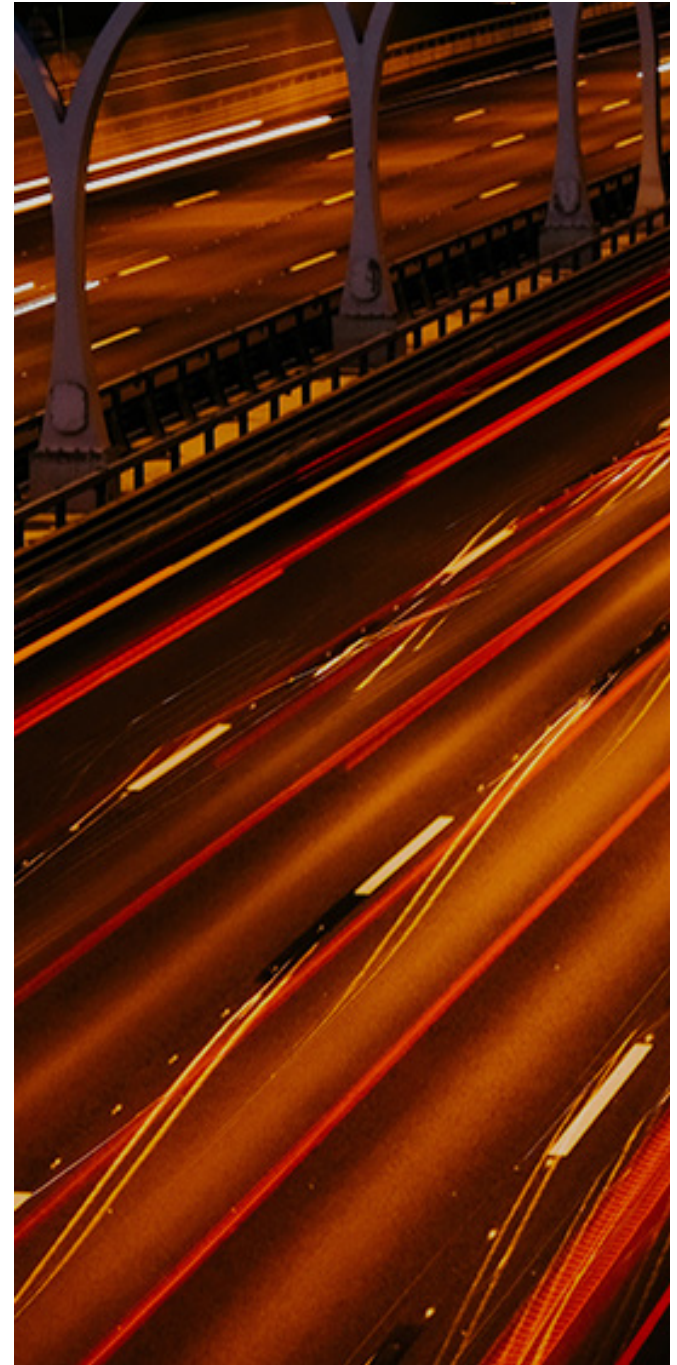
The question to understand is whether these preferences point to functional issues that could impact your success or if there are new capabilities to consider. According to a survey from the Cloud Native

Computing Foundation, software release cycles are accelerating due to the rise in available continuous integration and delivery (CI/CD) tools.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the experiences you may have had six or nine months ago are worth revisiting.

Takeaway: First-hand experiences are perfectly legitimate criteria to use when selecting a cloud provider, but it should be validated during the assessment process.

<sup>1</sup>[The Advantages of Data-Driven Decision-Making](#), HBS Online, August 26, 2019

<sup>2</sup>[2019 CNCF Survey Results](#), Cloud Native Computing Foundation, March 4, 2020



## #2: Ensure the Cloud Provider Is a Team Player

Many organizations are looking to migrate workloads or data between different cloud environments or deliver a single business function across multiple clouds. According to an IBM survey, 85% of organizations are now using multiple clouds, of which the majority are public and private hybrid clouds.<sup>3</sup>

A multi-cloud or hybrid cloud environment can deliver powerful efficiencies and cost savings, but it is crucial to understand how they will work together—or you may end up investing more time and resources than it's worth.

Consider whether the cloud provider delivers the interoperability you need to manage workloads across all environments. For instance, does the provider offer tools for ingesting workloads from other platforms? If not, do you have other tools in place

that can help? A common management platform like VMware can provide endpoints for numerous providers in the private cloud and the hyperscale cloud. This can help eliminate cumbersome conversions at VM and virtual network layers that unnecessarily burden IT staff and prevent them from focusing on other priorities.

Takeaway: It is not just about the strengths of any one cloud provider, but how they operate together as a team. A winning combination will let you move seamlessly between cloud platforms.

<sup>3</sup>[85% of Companies Now Operating in Multi-Cloud Environment](#), CloudPro, August 7, 2019



## #3: Consider Your Near-Term Application Goals

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For many organizations, reaping the full benefits of the cloud means moving to a truly cloud-native architecture via platform as a service (PaaS.) While this is a worthy aspiration, getting there can take years depending on the complexity of your applications and transformation goals.

Unless your business was built entirely on the public cloud, many enterprise applications will require some level of refactoring. Even migrating SQL databases from Microsoft® Windows® to Microsoft Azure® is not a simple lift and shift. That's why any successful cloud migration needs to take into account the effort, specialized skills and cost involved in moving business-critical databases and applications to the cloud without compromising performance.

Which applications can you incrementally refactor as part of a phased approach, and which can you continue to run on-premises or in your private cloud? Ultimately, this will help you choose the right cloud platforms and partners to work with, so you can put a realistic timeline, budget and roadmap into place for application modernization.

Takeaway: Migrating to the cloud is not a long-term strategy; it's an incremental process that will help you choose the right cloud solution and approach at every stage of application modernization.



## #4: Understand Your Physical Dependencies

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Most workloads, particularly those created in the last five years, can run on any virtual platform with equal abilities. There are, however, many older workloads that are dependent on a particular piece of hardware that can't be virtualized, such as proprietary operating systems and specialized storage hardware. Additionally, your business may have developed proprietary technology that needs to be managed on-premises or you may have expensive hardware that has not yet been fully amortized.

In a rush to the cloud, many organizations don't realize how physical dependencies can impact their workloads. This can lead to serious cost, performance and security repercussions, forcing organizations to rethink their deployments and bring resources back in-house. An IDC survey found that 80% of organizations report repatriating workloads from the public cloud.<sup>4</sup> Top drivers included security, performance, cost, control, and the need to centralize or reduce shadow IT.

That doesn't mean the public cloud is wrong for your business. But it's important to fully understand your requirements, including physical dependencies, so you can develop a cloud strategy that meets your cost, performance, security and compliance requirements. Then you can identify which cloud model and provider meet your needs.

Keep in mind that some providers offer a broad range of valuable services beyond the cloud, such as managed hosting, colocation services and other highly specialized skills that can help you optimize workloads across both physical and virtualized environments.

Takeaway: Factor in all your applications, databases and systems, and where they need to reside, before developing a cloud migration path and provider to support you.

<sup>4</sup> [As Workloads Migrate Back from Public Clouds, Hybrid Cloud Grows](#), Network World, June 11, 2019



# #5: Get Informed on Security and Compliance

According to a 451 Research survey on cloud vendor selection criteria, security and compliance are most frequently identified (77%) as important to public cloud vendor selection. This requirement is even stronger among public sector (85%), finance (89%) and healthcare (95%) firms, all of which are subject to specific compliance mandates.<sup>5</sup>

If security and compliance are table stakes for the cloud, how can you be sure that you have the right provider by your side? It starts by understanding your own security risks and vulnerabilities. This will help you have more informed conversations and understand how the provider can help you versus where you will need to take responsibility.

<b>Data and IT Assets</b> Do you know where your data and IT assets reside? As Garrett Bekker, a principal security analyst at 451 Research, noted to InformationWeek, “Companies don’t know where their data is and what the sensitivity level is, and that’s become a huge problem with some of the data privacy laws.” <sup>6</sup>	<b>Geographic Needs</b> In most cases, applications should be hosted as close as possible to the end users to maximize performance. Additionally, some data (e.g., financial) may be required to stay within the borders of a country for regulatory purposes.	<b>Compliance Regulations</b> Do you know what regulations you are subject to? Some, like the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), are industry-specific. Others, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and California Privacy Act (CCPA), impact organizations across industries and geographies.
<b>Recovery and Backup</b> Ransomware, data breaches and other catastrophic events need to be considered well in advance. How are your systems, people and processes prepared for the worst-case scenario?	<b>Accessibility and Control</b> What controls do you have in place to manage access to IT resources and data? How will you be able to maintain or strengthen those controls as you migrate to new environments?	<b>In-House Expertise</b> Do you have the right security and compliance experts on staff to help you assess your needs and cloud migration path? If not, you may want to consider outside counsel and support in this process.

Takeaway: Selecting the right cloud provider is a top priority for security and compliance, but make sure you understand what your needs are first before embarking on a path.

<sup>5</sup>Voice of the Enterprise: Cloud, Hosting and Managed Services, 451 Research, now part of S&P Global Market Intelligence, December 30, 2019

<sup>6</sup>[Top Security Mistakes Putting Your Company at Risk](#), InformationWeek, August 2018



## #6: Don't Get Clouded by the Lowest Price

Many cloud providers have similar pricing and often bundle in extra services for free or at a discounted cost. This can be compelling—or confusing—if you are comparing just on price. Instead of spending time gathering quotes from multiple providers, narrow down your options by looking at two key areas: fixed vs. metered pricing and public vs. private cloud.

Pay-as-you-go, metered pricing is one of the great advantages of the cloud, but you could be saddled with unexpected costs if you suddenly have to move a large amount of data. And while fixed pricing lets you plan ahead, it doesn't account for fluctuations in your business.

How you determine the right approach depends on the maturity, size and scale

of your business. If your business is new or you expect to have rapidly changing requirements, a metered cloud like Amazon Web Services (AWS) or Azure will allow you to align business needs with your monthly bill. On the other hand, if you are a more mature business with larger, well-described compute and storage requirements, the private cloud may be a better option. Once you reach a certain threshold, generally in the 50-75 VM range, hosting compute resources and hardware on-site in your data center can be more cost-effective in the long run.

Takeaway: Instead of asking which cloud provider is cheapest, find out which pricing and cloud model is best suited to the maturity, size and scale of your organization.



To learn how Navisite can help your organization plan, migrate and fully harness the benefits of the cloud, download this [solution brief](#) or [contact us](#) today.

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