The Midwestern Skeptic’s Guide to Cloud ERP

18 sensible questions every business leader should ask about the cloud
Midwesterners are just as open to good ideas as anyone, but they don’t jump on a bandwagon without understanding exactly what’s at stake. A healthy dose of skepticism is smart business and can save your organization a lot of headaches. The cloud may indeed be all it’s cracked up to be but asking tough questions to ensure it is right for your business is sensible.

There is no question that a growing number of organizations, across every industry, are moving their business and financial management applications to the cloud. Cloud ERP provides an alternative to organizations that don’t want to spend time, money and resources maintaining the infrastructure that houses their business management applications.

In this eBook, we’ll pose the questions you need to ask ERP vendors and cloud service providers. We’ll also provide guidance on what you should expect to hear in their answers. Read on to prepare yourself for a practical, sensible approach to evaluating the cloud.

Section 1: Questions about security and performance

Section 2: Questions about cost savings

Section 3: Questions about day-to-day operations

Section 4: Questions about strategic advantages
1. How will our data be secured?
In many cases, the professional-level security provided by reputable cloud infrastructure and service providers is far greater than individual organizations can maintain. Your ERP partner should be able to provide you with clear descriptions of the governance, operational and regulatory guidelines that will assure the security of your corporate and customer data.

2. Will we still own our data?
This is an important question to ask and should also include how you will receive your data if you choose to change ERP systems. If your customers’ information, like credit card data, will be tracked through the ERP, ISV (Independent Software Vendor) or LOB (Line of Business) solutions, you need to know how it will be secured and protected in case you decide to change vendors.

3. Will the ERP system respond as fast as it does now?
With a cloud ERP system, you will be dependent on the internet connection for accessing the system. Work with your ERP partner to assess your current needs, usage and access to determine the best system architecture. Consider all of your organization’s locations to realistically evaluate performance and the potential impacts on productivity.
4. **How does the cloud reduce IT costs?**

Cloud-based ERP eliminates ongoing capital investments in hardware, storage and software. Software updates and back-up costs are generally included in the monthly subscription costs, reducing the need for IT resources to support ERP. Deployments require fewer onsite hours from your ERP partner.

5. **How will cloud services affect the internal IT team?**

When you move your applications and workloads to a cloud platform, many administrative services, like help desk and back-ups, are provided by the software vendor. With less focus on administrative tasks, IT staffers can assume a more strategic role. They can help you to take full advantage of the functionality of the software and apply technology to explore new business opportunities improve operations.

6. **What options do I have in licensing ERP software in the cloud?**

Cloud-based ERP is most commonly licensed through a subscription model based on number of users. You pay a monthly fee for users to access the software. Through a hosting model, you can continue to own the software while the application is supported in a secure, cloud environment.
7. **Will upgrades be easier?**

Software upgrades have historically been one of the most challenging and time-consuming tasks for the IT department. New hardware requirements, upgrading ISV solutions and troubleshooting user errors are just some of the headaches that are minimized with cloud. With fewer moving parts, upgrades are easier and, in most cases, a non-event.

8. **How will we handle integrations and data management?**

The leading ERP cloud solutions are designed to simplify integrations and data management. Standardized APIs make connecting to line-of-business applications and productivity solutions easier. Data can be centralized in the cloud to take full advantage of the most modern business intelligence and analytics solutions.
9. **Will employees working from home be able to access the system?**

With a cloud ERP system, employees will be able to perform all of their tasks at home—or wherever their work takes them—through an internet connection. Data is more secure, residing and managed in the cloud instead of housed on home computers, individual laptops and thumb drives.

10. **Will our ISV and LOB solutions work with cloud-based ERP?**

Many organizations use ISV and LOB applications to manage specific functions or industry-specific requirements. Some of the applications you depend on are probably already in the cloud, while some are still in the process. As you evaluate cloud ERP solutions, make sure the ISV and LOB solutions you depend on will be supported.

11. **Will we be able to support automated business processes?**

The cloud enables you to integrate more of your productivity and business management systems to reduce the time people spend searching for and re-entering data into systems. Leading cloud ERP systems are designed to automate more business processes to allow workers to focus on more profit-building activities.
Day-to-Day Operations

12. How will users be supported?

Cloud ERP shifts much of the responsibility for user support to your software partner, so it is critical to understand the service levels that will be provided. Users should receive fast, attentive support to keep them happy and productive. A comprehensive service-level agreement (SLA) will define the responsibilities and response expectations. Also ask about training options that will be available to your users.

13. Will we have complete, timely information delivered through mobile devices?

Mobility and remote access are becoming more important to most business operations. Supporting service workers in the field, salespeople on the road or managers in meetings, almost everyone uses tablets and mobile devices to access timely, accurate information for efficiency and productivity. With the mobility capabilities of cloud ERP, employees gain full access to customer information, tasks, approvals and dashboards—no matter where their work takes them.

CSP

A Cloud Service Provider (CSP), offers expert guidance to help businesses take full advantage of cloud-based platform, infrastructure, application, back-up and recovery services.
14. How does a cloud ERP solution support growth?

One of the biggest benefits of cloud-based ERP is to help you prepare the changing nature of business. With cloud ERP, you can bridge geographic boundaries to expand the business in any direction. Acquisitions become easier as systems can be replaced or merged in the cloud. Your organization will be prepared to take advantage of new technologies like new Artificial Intelligence (AI) or Internet of Things (IoT). The cloud makes it easier to connect people, processes, data and things to grow your business.

15. Does the cloud provide an opportunity to rethink our business processes?

A migration to the cloud is the perfect time to assess your current systems and processes. Moving to the cloud makes it easier to connect employees across the street and the globe to promote collaboration. The cloud provides the platform to transform your organization into a digital business. You can replace aging ISV and LOB applications with cloud-based or updated systems that will help you break down departmental silos and streamline processes.
16. Is cloud ERP an effective business continuity strategy?

The cloud has become the lifeline for thousands of businesses struck by disaster. Cloud vendors’ core function is providing infrastructure business continuity, so you can focus on your customers, employees and facilities during an unexpected event.

17. Is cloud ERP a good choice if we are considering going public?

Cloud ERP is the choice of many start-up companies that hope to go public over time. A big part of being IPO-ready includes understanding security and reporting requirements for public companies and establishing company guidelines, processes, systems and procedures to keep these requirements in mind as the company grows.

18. Will the software keep up with changing times?

Technology will continue to change, driving new business practices and new ways to interact with customers. The leading cloud ERP providers stay in front of the trends and provide a clear plan for continuous improvement that will deliver ever greater financial control and operational insight over time.
The Midwestern Cloud ERP Partner
Equipped to Answer the Hard Questions

At OTT Inc., we focus on learning your business and your business processes to provide the right solutions to help you grow your business. Committed to be your trusted business solutions partner, we can help you with automated accounting, enterprise resource planning, customer relationship management, business intelligence, document management, electronic commerce and cloud computing.

We leverage industry leading applications like Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Microsoft Dynamics GP, Microsoft Dynamics 365, NetSuite, Microsoft Office 365 and complementary independent software vendor solutions. All delivered with expert business analysis, training, implementation and ongoing support services.

OTT, Inc. is headquartered in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. We have worked with hundreds of companies like yours, helping them take advantage of cloud technologies to improve productivity, control costs and build for the future.

Let’s talk about how the cloud can help your business grow. Contact us for a FREE 2-hour Cloud Feasibility Assessment.

Call Eric Sheehan
651-558-7527
651-262-2622
esheehan@ott-inc.com
www.ott-inc.com

The Trusted Partner Path

To ensure client success, every project we undertake follows OTT Inc.’s proven five-step methodology to deliver improved productivity, efficiency and profitability. The Trusted Partner Path, defines how we will work with you to produce measurable business performance, bottom-line rewards and a technology framework for sustained growth.

1. **Assessment**: We gather information about your business.
2. **Analysis**: We review all your key business processes.
3. **Planning**: We define goals, expectations and project scope.
4. **Implementation**: Our methodology streamlines implementation.
5. **Measurement**: We confirm that all success criteria are met.

Education, communication and support are well defined for each step in the path. Our experience and consistent methodology will assure a smooth transition to cloud ERP.