

Cloud solutions have caught on rapidly over the past few years — why and will the evolution continue?

# Field Service Companies Continue Cloud Migration

The level of cloud-computing adoption in the enterprise is increasing as IT departments search for ways to reduce costs and end users demand anytime/anywhere access to corporate data. Forrester Research expects the global market for cloud computing to grow from \$41 billion as of 2011 to \$241 billion in 2020. Field service is one line-of-business application that is quickly gaining acceptance as a cloud-based or hosted solution. “For field service, being cloud-based is even more important than other functions,” Dave Yarnold, CEO of ServiceMax said. “Field service workers are, by definition, working remotely, and they need to be able to access information to do their job from anywhere. Universal access via mobile or Web browser is a key advantage for field service technology in the cloud.”

Many large companies still prefer on-premise solutions (in part because of security or reliability concerns) and can afford to support those solutions with their own large IT departments. But for mobile solutions like field service, many companies are coming around to the idea that a hosted model makes more sense. “We’ve found that once a company has migrated its sales automation, or its ERP, or any other important system to the cloud, then they are over the hump,” says Kris Brannock, VP of corporate development at Vertical Solutions. “They are ready to move other applications to the

cloud. At that point, they are more concerned with functionality and managing integration points than they are with security.”

## Cost Drives Cloud-Based Service Solutions

Why do companies ultimately make the leap to the cloud? Cloud-based solutions have a number of advantages, including increased flexibility, scalability, ease of use, and lower IT support requirements. If the system exists in the cloud, internal IT staff can be freed up to work on other projects and initiatives. “All this equates to a substantially lower cost of ownership, which affects the entire organization positively by significantly affecting the bottom line,” says Yuval Brisker, CEO and cofounder of TOA Technologies. “Also, SaaS and Cloud-based software is a platform for ongoing innovation that is delivered continuously to users with no delay, helping enterprises stay ahead of the technology curve.”

Cost is critical, particularly for small and mid-sized business. These companies like the idea of only paying for what they use, particularly in the current investment environment where credit is tight. “One important factor for mid-sized organizations is the ability to pay as they go on a subscription basis, versus purchasing on-premise licenses,” Brannock says. “That is a very attractive proposition for growing companies.”

The increased consumerization of IT also contributes to the push into the cloud, Yarnold says. “The new



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breed of mobile devices, especially consumer devices, such as Android and iOS, and social collaboration technologies are steering more and more companies to the cloud,” Yarnold says. “These consumer devices and collaboration technologies run in the cloud, and employees are starting to demand access to them in the workplace.”

### **Cloud-Based Solutions Provide New Features**

Benefits go beyond just cost savings and employee satisfaction, however. Cloud-based solutions also enable some new features and functionality that are either unavailable or difficult to execute with an on-premise solution.

Cloud solutions often include more adaptive, robust, and flexible configuration tools. Software deployments are easily accomplished from a central location. These solutions also have always-on availability, and can ensure mobile device access. “Cloud-based applications also offer continual upgrades as part of the package,” Brannock says. “There is no more angst about picking the right time, no more challenges with business disruption.”

Real-time data is another important component, since cloud solutions rely on this type of connectivity in order to function. “On-premise solutions do not demand or enable this in any way,” Brisker says. “But a cloud-based solution is natively enabled by an active, mobile Web connection, and thus ensures that the picture seen in the back-office is indeed the real, true picture of the current field environment. All this enables a more complete, more timely, and ultimately more relevant decision-making process and management of mobile resources.”

Because the solution is hosted, data storage can also be handled in the cloud, improving security and disaster recovery. “Companies can safely store data within a provider’s secure data center, instead of an in-house server room,” Brisker says. “This added security feature of the cloud ensures that an organization’s data will be safe and automatically restored on an end-point as long as the user is connected to the Internet.”

### **How To Evaluate Software Vendor Platforms**

The vendors interviewed for this story offered a number of tips for evaluating cloud-based solutions for field service, including determining whether the solution is truly flexible and “future ready” (to support new devices and applications), ensuring that deployment can be handled easily and effectively, and checking to make sure the software vendor has relevant experience in your vertical market.

“You need to know in advance what the limitations will be, and how they will affect your organization,” Brannock says. “Your vendor should provide customer references: ask them how the vendor managed integration touch points. Ask how they handle cloud governance. Does the vendor deliver real-time integration? How about across-the-board, behind-the-scenes upgrades — how do they work? How often do they happen? How will they impact you?”

The software platform is also important. “I also would advise companies to work with technology partners who are built natively in the cloud,” Yarnold says. “There are many pretenders in the space, relics from the days of on-premise, who claim to offer cloud technologies, too. Solutions that support both cloud and on-premise can introduce inefficiencies and bog down engineering resources with necessary infrastructure and product release upgrades and customization requirements.”

### **New Technologies Will Enable More Cloud Adoption**

Cloud-based solutions for field service automation will continue to proliferate as more robust mobile devices are developed, use of the HTML5 programming language increases, and 4G networks expand. “4G ubiquity means increased availability, ‘always-on’ usability, and a rapid speed of response that will enable Web-based applications,” Brisker says, adding that the use of social networking technologies will eventually impact this space as well. “The penetration of the social Web into the enterprise is in its infancy, and this trend is totally dependent on Web connectivity; the cloud will be underwriting all of these, not separately, but together.”

Smaller companies will continue to gravitate toward cloud-based field service solutions, primarily because of the cost and convenience they offer. “It’s a very attractive market, because the cost of entry for cloud solutions is so low, compared with on-premise solutions,” Brannock says. “It’s a lot easier for companies to make the leap to a full-featured field service solution in the cloud.”

As these companies expand their deployments and reap the benefits, their competitors will likely follow suit. “Companies that were early to the cloud have been able to focus their efforts on innovation and use that as a competitive advantage leaving on-premise companies in the dust,” Yarnold says. “They’ll eventually see this massive shift to cloud-based technology and realize that they need to be there, too.” ●