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Expanding Operations in the Cloud

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Businesses across every industry are exploring cloud-based solutions in an effort to increase operational efficiency, cut costs and boost revenues. In fact, hosted strategies are now being implemented on a widespread basis to build bridges between companies and their mission-critical data, enabling both employees and equipment to function at optimal levels as they seek to complete every task.

Today, cloud-based solutions are available for everything from email and enterprise resource management systems to content management and customer relationship management applications. And, the inherent benefits of the cloud can be found deep and wide across every organization that has chosen to follow this path. The number of adopters grows exponentially on a daily basis, so it should be no surprise that so many leading construction companies have begun to embrace the cloud as well ... but with careful considerations.

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

There are many variables to consider before a construction company should take its enterprise resource planning (ERP) system to the cloud; first and foremost, is timing. Obviously, moving to the cloud is an easier decision if a construction firm is making an initial ERP purchase or if they are due for an upgrade of their existing ERP system or IT infrastructure. Rather than making a capital outlay for new or additional hardware and the required internal support resources, firms may wisely opt for the cloud and apply their focus and dollars elsewhere.

Another critical question that must be answered before leaping into the cloud is regarding the level of available onsite expertise. While construction companies are extremely adept at creating, building and servicing incredible structures, they may simply lack the ability to manage networks and other IT infrastructure. Such firms can reduce their exposure to the risk of an unsuccessful implementation as well as alleviate the burden of an additional project pushed onto its employees who are already being asked to do more with less in today's economy. The best path may indeed be to follow the guidance of third-party experts outside of the organization when it comes to working with ERP in the cloud.

As construction companies leverage more and more technology like enterprise resource planning systems to improve and increase their business, the cloud can be an ideal way to support their growth. A hosted solution can offer the ability to better align internal resources, as well as provide flexibility, in that, the company can buy or rent as much infrastructure as needed today, and easily scale to larger systems in the future to address both organic growth or mergers and acquisitions. And, perhaps even more appealing than all of that, the return on investment from

a cloud-based solution can come faster because it lacks the upfront costs associated with traditional in-house information technology models.

And What About IT?

Not every cloud is fluffy and white. Configuring the appropriate solution can be a difficult task. That's why so many construction companies have turned to third-party providers when it comes to ensuring a smooth implementation. There's no harm in leveraging someone else's expertise to make sure things "fit" and "work." Not to mention the anxiety waiting down the road when upgrades, compatibility, hardware, software and middleware issues come calling.

A cloud-based solution allows construction companies to license what they need today and scale as the business' demands increase, without scaling up on the inside. From the initial installation and training to ongoing management, the cloud-based solutions provider takes on the burden of the technology, while the construction firm capitalizes on its benefits to increase operational efficiency and drive revenue, all at a lower cost of doing business.

A true cloud-based solution provider should build a system that supports the construction companies' business processes and even improves those processes by leveraging technology on an ongoing basis. As automated activities replace outdated manual tasks and disjointed workflows, a more powerful digital entity with more informed and capable employees should emerge.

Building a Better Business

As construction firms have increasingly moved to mobile workforces, cloud-based ERP solutions have become their virtual backbone of support. Data is shared securely between the field and home office to ensure mission-critical data is in the hands of the appropriate decision maker when and where it is needed. Companies can easily and seamlessly manage numerous projects across multiple locations, including both human resources and capital equipment, to drive jobs forward on time and on budget.

What were once paper-based processes and time-consuming tasks that allowed for too many human errors are now newly revitalized business processes that foster growth and success. Necessary resources are able to be allocated to each job immediately and status updates are available in real time, whether data is required for bidding, construction, recruiting, accounting, subcontracting or compliance.

Efficient Data Management

Digital data is wonderful. Of course, the key is being able to access it when and where it is required in real time. Thankfully, a cloud-based ERP solution can do just that. Such systems can allow multiple parties 24/7 access to decision-making information.

However, today it needs to go a few steps farther than that. Construction companies need to know their data is stored securely and can be communicated confidentially, and that there's a back-up plan for natural disasters or otherwise. And, just because a firm moves to the cloud, doesn't mean they lose ownership of their information. In fact, with a strong solutions-provider partner, construction companies can leverage their data to drive even more business in less time.

That partner can also help determine the most appropriate methods for data warehousing, updates and access, as well as how in-house and field employees connect. They should make recommendations regarding devices, bandwidth, virtual private networks, the internet and security, to make sure the entire firm is integrated seamlessly. And, they should understand the people and processes that drive each project so the construction companies' resources and supporting applications function in harmony.

Generating Return on Investment

There is no doubt that implementing a cloud-based enterprise resource planning system has a lower cost of entry, but it can also offer a lower total cost of ownership if managed appropriately with the right provider. A hosted-solution can mean predictable future expenditures based on a pay-as-you go model. And, construction companies can eliminate internal administrative overhead, while saving IT time and budget. Best of all, every resource in the firm is focused on what they do best, accomplishing the most goals in the least amount of time by applying expertise and individualized skill sets to a properly aligned objective.

Construction in the Cloud

Because of the maturity of hosted, cloud-based solutions, enterprise resource management and its associated applications are making a seamless move to the cloud. Taking an outsourced approach to technology is helping construction companies drive their businesses farther, faster, without any barriers to entry or concerns about system management over time. Careful examination of the business, technological and workflow considerations associated with such an approach to construction may prove that every cloud does indeed have a silver lining.



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