

Is Your Firm Cloud-Ready?

The Complete
Assessment Guide



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01

Intro to the Cloud

The Cloud Transition

From 'Nice-to-Have' to Business-Critical

Let's be honest—many accounting firms are dragging their feet when it comes to moving to the cloud. And we get it. The thought of migrating from your tried-and-true on-premises systems can feel overwhelming.

But here's the thing: While you're weighing the pros and cons, the accounting world isn't standing still. Your clients want instant access to their data. Your team expects to work from anywhere. And don't even get us started on the moving target of security and compliance requirements.

So, who's actually thriving in all this? The firms that are using technology to their advantage. According to [Rightworks' 2024 Accounting Firm Technology Study](#), firms with a secure cloud environment and a well-defined, connected technology stack, among other advancements, reported 29% more revenue per employee than those without it.

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more revenue
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Here's the hard truth: Cloud adoption is no longer optional for accounting practices that want to remain competitive. It's become an essential strategy for three critical reasons:

1 Client Expectations

Both individual and business clients now demand anytime, anywhere access to their financial data and expect their CPAs to provide it securely. The days of mailing paper statements are over.

2 Talent Retention

A new generation of tech-savvy accountants is entering the profession, but not in sufficient numbers. Cloud-enabled firms have the advantage as they can offer the efficiency and remote work capabilities that attract and retain today's best professionals.

3 Operational Efficiency

Hosting accounting software and data in the cloud enables firms to streamline workflows, automate manual tasks, and scale resources up or down as needed. Other great advantages include consolidating and reducing annual IT costs.

The question is no longer whether you should adopt cloud technology; it's how. The costs of delay can add up to frustrated clients, inefficient processes, and difficulty attracting top talent—all high-ticket items when it comes to running a profitable accounting firm.



In this eBook, we'll provide a practical roadmap to help you confidently navigate your transition to the cloud.

You'll learn how to:

- ✓ Evaluate your readiness
- ✓ Choose the right platform
- ✓ Ensure airtight security
- ✓ Bring your team and clients along the journey

By the final chapter, you'll have a clear action plan to unlock the benefits of the cloud in your own practice. The accounting industry is changing rapidly, but your firm can stay ahead of the curve with the right technology strategy.

02

Current Landscape

IT in Today's Accounting Firms

Data security concerns, remote work challenges, clunky on-premises hardware that seems to create more problems than it solves—sound familiar?

If so, you're not alone.

Today's accounting firms are facing a perfect storm of IT challenges:



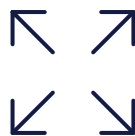
Cybersecurity threats that put sensitive firm and client data at risk.



Remote work pressures that strain traditional office-based setups.



Manual, time-consuming processes that drain productivity.



Constantly evolving regulations make compliance a moving target.

At the root of all these issues? Outdated, on-premises IT infrastructure that simply can't keep up with the demands of modern accounting.

Having your applications and data tied to specific devices and locations worked fine when everyone was in the office from 9 to 5. But in an era of remote work, real-time collaboration, and 24/7 client demands? Not so much.

The good news is there's a better way: Cloud hosting.



Benefits of Cloud Hosting

By moving your accounting software and data to a secure, centralized cloud environment, you can:

- ✓ Access everything you need from anywhere, on any device.
- ✓ Keep your data secure and compliant with automatic updates and backups.
- ✓ Streamline processes and boost productivity with real-time collaboration tools.
- ✓ Scale your IT resources up or down instantly based on demand.

In short, the cloud gives you the flexibility, security, and efficiency you need today.

But making the shift to cloud hosting can feel overwhelming, especially if you're not a tech expert.

In the following chapters, we'll break down everything you need to know to make a smooth transition to the cloud, including:

- ✓ An assessment to determine your readiness for the cloud.
- ✓ The most common myths about cloud hosting.
- ✓ Interview tips for cloud providers.
- ✓ Cloud migration FAQs and next steps.

By the end, you'll have a clear roadmap for leaving your IT challenges behind and embracing a more modern, cloud-powered approach to accounting.

03

Assessment

Is Cloud Hosting the Right Move for Your Accounting Firm?

The advantages of cloud hosting are compelling. However, deciding to make the transition requires careful consideration of your firm's specific readiness indicators and your operational needs.

We've created a straightforward assessment to help you evaluate your firm's current standing and determine whether cloud hosting aligns with your future goals.

Does your firm...	Yes	No	Don't Know
Currently use tax software compatible with cloud hosting environments?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Need users to access tax and accounting applications at the same time?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Currently use or plan to use any cloud-based applications (e.g., QuickBooks Online, BILL, client banking software)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have clients who need to access their QuickBooks Desktop files or other accounting data remotely?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experience performance issues or find managing multiple applications challenging?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Plan to scale and grow in the near future?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Want to do more in terms of data security, backup, and disaster recovery?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Your Results: Drumroll, please...

Mostly YES answers (5-7 "yes" responses)

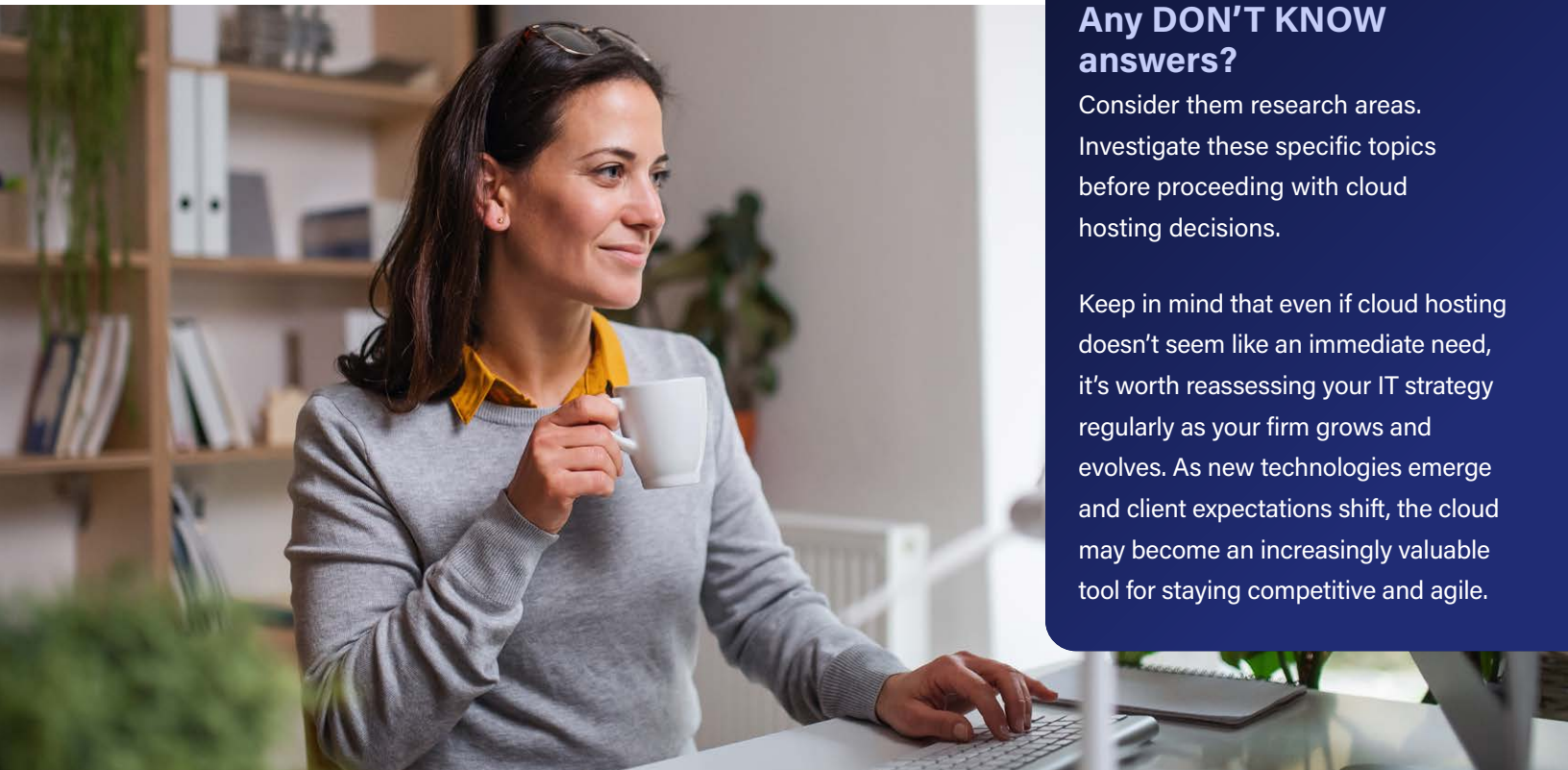
Your firm is ready and would benefit significantly from a cloud-based provider. You have the infrastructure needs, growth plans, and pain points that cloud hosting is designed to solve. The more "yes" answers, the more urgent and beneficial the transition would be for your firm.

Mixed responses (3-4 "yes" answers)

Your firm is partially ready and could benefit from cloud hosting, but it may not be urgent. You should evaluate which specific areas (the "yes" responses) are causing the most challenges and consider a phased approach to cloud adoption.

Mostly NO answers (0-2 "yes" responses)

Your firm may not be ready for cloud hosting at this time. Your current setup might be adequately meeting your needs. However, you should reassess periodically as your firm grows or as technology needs change.



Any DON'T KNOW answers?

Consider them research areas. Investigate these specific topics before proceeding with cloud hosting decisions.

Keep in mind that even if cloud hosting doesn't seem like an immediate need, it's worth reassessing your IT strategy regularly as your firm grows and evolves. As new technologies emerge and client expectations shift, the cloud may become an increasingly valuable tool for staying competitive and agile.

04

Cloud Hesitations

Myth-Busting Cloud Concerns

So, what's really keeping
accounting firms on the sidelines?

“Moving to the
cloud doesn't
mean giving up
control—in fact,
it often means
gaining more.”

Maybe cloud hosting feels like another tech fad that will fizzle out. Maybe you've been burned by “revolutionary” software promises before, and you're not buying it this time. Maybe the thought of migrating years of client data feels like opening Pandora's box.

Whatever's holding you back, you're not alone. We've heard the same concerns from firm owners across the country: Losing control, unreliable internet, security risks, managing the transition, getting locked into a vendor, and staying compliant. Let's tackle these concerns head-on and separate fact from fiction.



“Most firms stop working Friday evening and are running in the cloud by Monday morning.”

Myth #1: “The cloud isn’t secure.”

Cloud data centers typically have robust physical and digital security measures that surpass on-premises capabilities. Data is encrypted, backups are automated, and regular audits identify vulnerabilities. Pair that with strong authentication and regular employee security training, which many cloud providers include, and you’re looking at enterprise-level security that most firms could never afford on their own.

Myth #2: “Getting set up in the cloud takes too long. I can’t afford that much downtime.”

Actual downtime during migration depends on the complexity of your setup—simple environments may require just hours, while complex ones typically require a weekend. Though the full migration process spans weeks for planning, the critical downtime is much shorter.

Most firms stop working Friday evening and are running in the cloud by Monday morning. Your provider will plan the migration with you to minimize downtime and ensure you know exactly what to expect.

Myth #3: “I won’t have any control over my applications and software.”

Moving to the cloud doesn’t mean giving up control. In fact, cloud platforms often provide greater visibility and control over data access and permissions. This is especially true when it comes to onboarding and offboarding employees in record time; assigning access by user, date, and time; and obtaining reports on user activity and failed login attempts.

Myth #4: “I’ll have to rely on an internet connection to get my work done.”

While cloud hosting relies on internet access, any brief connectivity issues shouldn’t impact your productivity. Quality cloud platforms offer high uptime guarantees, offline synchronization, and mobile access options to mitigate any connection issues that may arise.

Myth #5: “My staff doesn’t have time to learn how to use something new.”

Getting staff comfortable with launching their applications from a cloud portal is a small investment compared to the efficiency, security, and compliance gains you’ll receive in return.

Additionally, leading cloud providers offer migration assistance, training resources, and ongoing support to ensure seamless transitions and rapid user adoption.

Myth #6: “I’ll become too dependent on one vendor.”

Partnering with a reputable, accounting-focused provider can alleviate concerns about overreliance on a single source. Firms should carefully evaluate a provider’s track record, support model, and specialization to find a partner invested in mutual success.

Myth #7: “The cloud isn’t compliant with the same regulatory requirements I need.”

Top platforms integrate GAPP, IRS 4557, and other regulatory requirements into their core functionality. They enable easy audit reporting and provide the security features needed to maintain compliance. Look for a cloud provider that specializes in accounting firms and understands your profession’s unique compliance and security requirements.

05

Finding a Cloud Provider

Interview Tips for Potential Cloud Providers

Vetting is crucial for accounting firms seeking to migrate their apps and software to the cloud. But which questions should you ask when evaluating potential providers? And what types of answers should you expect—or demand—to receive?

Keep these questions in mind to ensure the cloud provider you choose is perfectly suited to support your accounting firm's productivity, security, and growth.

Application & Software Support

Ask Potential Providers...

Do you have extensive experience specifically with accounting and tax applications?

How do you support main applications like [list your most vital apps]?

Can you explain how your app pricing works? If I have 7-year Lacerte tax software, does that count as 1 app or 7?

Can you ensure that our core applications will all run smoothly and work together seamlessly in your cloud environment?

The Best Providers Will Say...

"YES!"

Look for a provider who is focused on serving the unique needs of accounting and tax firms like yours.

"We support all of those apps as well as..."

Ensure the provider supports all your key software and obtain details on how it is maintained.

"Sure, I can walk you through our pricing structure and provide you with a solid estimate based on your tech stack and users."

Get all the specifics up front to avoid surprise fees later in the process.

"Yes, your applications will work seamlessly within our centralized platform."

For efficiency, your provider should be able to streamline your app access so that you don't have to switch between environments.

Ask Potential Providers...

Who handles software updates, and will they disrupt our access?

The Best Providers Will Say...

“Our team manages updates, and we avoid any disruptions by scheduling updates outside of peak business hours.”

Updates should be managed smoothly—outside of peak business hours—by the provider.

Could you provide me with references from accounting firms using our applications on your platform?

“Of course! I’ll shoot over some references for you as well as some customer testimonials.”

Any credible provider will have client references readily available.

Remote Access & Usability

Ask Potential Providers...

Do you offer remote access? Will users be able to work from anywhere as long as they have internet access?

The Best Providers Will Say...

“Yes, we know how important work flexibility is to firms like yours, and our solutions offer remote access and easy collaboration.”

Employees should be able to access the same apps simultaneously from any location.

Can you confirm that all of our current applications will be accessible remotely?

“Yes, all of your apps—even the desktop apps—can be hosted and accessed from our cloud-based platform.”

Streamlining workflows hinges on uniting all apps in the cloud. If any apps are not compatible with their systems, you may need to find another provider or review/update your tech stack.

What differentiates your platform from other service providers?

“We beat our competition on speed and uptime and offer more robust security features.”

Key areas of specialty include speed, reliability, security, and flexibility.

Ask Potential Providers...

What is the process to add/delete users?

The Best Providers Will Say...

"You can add and remove users in just a few clicks and control app access with easy admin tools."

Make sure your provider also streamlines administrative tasks for easy onboarding and offboarding.

What training will our firm receive?

"We'll onboard you and your team to support adoption and get everyone comfortable. Beyond that, we always offer 24/7 support."

A quality platform should require minimal training, but onboarding and continued support are a must.

Can you get us up and running virtually or is an onsite visit required?

"All of your setup will be completed virtually."

Virtual cutovers are ideal and demonstrate their level of expertise.

System Reliability & Performance

Ask Potential Providers...

What are your system downtime procedures, including communication protocols, preventative measures, and post-incident reviews?

The Best Providers Will Say...

"We offer full transparency and keep our customers informed of any status changes, incidents, and updates."

Look for clear, detailed explanations when handling system or performance updates.

Can you provide statistics on planned and unplanned downtime over the past two years?

"Yes, we document everything related to our system reliability."

Credible providers will readily share this data.

What actions do you take to ensure system reliability?

"We monitor our systems 24/7, perform proactive maintenance, and have multilayered security and infrastructure redundancy in place to keep our client data up and running no matter what."

Actions should clearly show how they are positively impacting uptime.

Ask Potential Providers...

Do you have client references, from firms with a similar profile to ours, who can speak to your track record on system reliability and performance?

The Best Providers Will Say...

"Yes, I have helped many firms like yours who would love to share their experiences with our platform."

Prior success with similar clients is a positive indicator.

Data Security & Confidentiality

Ask Potential Providers...

What are your data security standards and protocols for our firm and your employees?

The Best Providers Will Say...

"We have extensive security protocols in place to protect our customers, including running background checks on our employees, data encryption, and access controls that limit data visibility by role/need."

Explanations should be specific yet easy to understand.

Can you provide me with metrics on your monitoring systems and audit practices?

"Yes, let me pull those up for you."

Key performance indicators should be available.

What are your backup guidelines, data accessibility, and file restoration methods?

"We automatically back up all your data multiple times daily and store copies in different secure locations, so your files are always accessible and can be quickly restored whenever needed."

Look for well-defined processes and technologies, such as infrastructure redundancy, automated backups, and disaster recovery.

Can you share your confidentiality policy, third-party relationship rules, and privacy guidelines?

"We maintain strict confidentiality and privacy protections for all client data..."

The provider's standards should give you full confidence and have these and any other policies ready for your review.

Support & Service Levels

Ask Potential Providers...

What can we expect from your help desk?

The Best Providers Will Say...

“We offer a simple request process and rapid response times.”

Great providers will prioritize ease of use, fast response times, and self-service capabilities to minimize disruptions.

What is your ticketing system like and can you provide details on your support response, escalation, and reporting processes?

“Our ticketing system is designed for quick resolution. We guarantee initial response within 2 hours for critical issues and 4 hours for general requests during business hours...”

They should have standardized response times and a clear process for escalations. Vague or confusing responses are red flags.

What are your support hours during weekdays, weekends, and tax season?

“We offer continuous support 24/7, year-round.”

Around-the-clock availability is crucial since issues often arise outside business hours.

How do you handle after-hours and emergency support, including escalation?

“We are here anytime you need us, and we proactively communicate resolution targets based on severity.”

You should feel confident that unusual or one-time requests outside the typical support areas will still be handled quickly.

Take your time evaluating providers on these key points, and you'll find a cloud partner that actually makes your firm run better—more efficiently, more securely, and without the headaches.

06

Migration Examples

Cloud Migration FAQ

Moving to the cloud involves transferring all your software and data from your local computers to your cloud provider's systems. The process varies based on vendor, software mix, user count, and data size. Here are the top questions that come up when users consider moving to the cloud.

How long will the setup and migration process take?

The duration of the setup and migration process varies depending on factors such as the software used, the number of users working in the cloud, and the amount of data to be transferred.

For a sole proprietor moving a few clients to a cloud hosting platform, the process may be completed within a matter of hours, including planning, cutover, and post-migration tutorials.

However, for a 15-person firm requiring full cloud accessibility for everything from CCH® and Thomson Reuters® to scanners and printers, a more strategic approach would involve a few weeks of planning followed by a weekend cutover. This extended timeline is necessary to address four key areas:

- ✓ **Cloud Build:** Configuring servers, storage, and basic hosted network requirements, as well as application specifics and licensing.
- ✓ **Data:** Gathering data involves collaboration with the client and their provider, regardless of firm size.
- ✓ **Email:** Potentially encompassing mail migration, Office 365 tenant migration, and DNS changes.
- ✓ **Local Network:** Covering managed workstations, firewalls, cloud appliances, and Wi-Fi setup in the office with complexity ranging from simple to intricate.

While the process may seem daunting, a competent cloud provider will simplify the information gathering process and ensure a smooth transition to the cloud. They will work closely with you to plan the migration and execute the transition, minimizing any disruption to your business operations.

“A competent cloud provider will simplify the process and ensure a smooth transition.”



“Don’t forget to ensure your clients receive the same level of care that you do—so you’re not stuck playing tech support.”

Which software and apps can I migrate to the cloud?

Good providers will be able to host whatever you need hosted. If you encounter limitations on what can be migrated and accessed in the cloud or migrated to the cloud, you may need to consider a more suitable provider for your firm’s specific needs. Keep that in mind.

Can I move my Microsoft apps to the cloud?

At Rightworks, yes. Your cloud provider should explain which Office license SKUs are available (such as E3 or E5), how they can be accessed from a cloud environment, and the benefits of getting them in the cloud.

How much data storage is included once I move? Are there costs for additional data?

The amount of data you can move depends on the cloud provider and package. Standard data storage inclusions should always be discussed up front, typically in terms of GB per user. Your cloud provider will help you assess your current data to determine your storage needs.

Can I migrate my clients to the cloud?

Yes. Connected client hosting is highly recommended. When evaluating your cloud provider, discuss the process for hosting and onboarding clients.

Don’t forget to ensure that your clients will receive the same level of care that you do, so you’re not stuck playing tech support.

07

Next Steps

Making the Move

Your Next Steps

Cloud hosting isn't just about technology—it's about positioning your firm for the future. The cloud can offer your team the tools they need to do their best work from anywhere, provide clients with the modern experience they expect, and lay the groundwork for the operational foundation that enhances security and supports sustainable growth.

Today, cloud-based providers are the key to keeping up and moving ahead, and they make it easier than you'd expect. If that appeals to you, and since you've made it this far through this guide, you're clearly serious about exploring cloud hosting for your firm. Here's what to do next...

“Cloud hosting isn't just about technology—it's about positioning your firm for the future.”

Your Action Plan

Your Cloud Readiness

You're ready.

The assessment said you're ready.

And you can't wait to get started.

You're on the fence.

The assessment revealed a few gaps, and you're not feeling 100% confident in the cloud just yet.

You're not ready.

Next Steps

Start reaching out to accounting-focused cloud providers. Use the questions provided in chapter 5 to evaluate your options and don't settle for generic IT companies that don't understand your profession.

Look back at your assessment; focus on the areas where you answered “yes” or “don't know”. These represent either immediate opportunities for improvement or gaps in your current IT knowledge that need to be addressed. The more you learn about where you're at now and where you want to go in the future, the more confident you'll become in driving your firm forward.

That's okay. Bookmark this guide and revisit your assessment in six months. As your clients, staff, and services evolve, you may find yourself looking for ways to further streamline and secure your firm in the future.



The firms that are thriving aren't necessarily the biggest or longest-standing; they're the firms that've made strategic technology decisions with providers who understand the unique needs of the profession.

The information is in your hands. The choice to move your firm forward is yours. But remember—in a profession where trust, security, and efficiency define success, the firms that embrace cloud hosting today are building the competitive advantages that will serve them for years to come.

For over 20 years, Rightworks has designed cloud-based solutions exclusively for accounting professionals.

Schedule a demo today
to learn more.

rightworks.com/get-started