

## cloud services that could help your business

Cloud computing makes complex services much more affordable, secure and mobile and it is therefore of particular use to small and startup businesses. Although accessing services from “the cloud” has its risks, it is almost certainly the way of the future.

Here are some cloud services that may be worth looking into for your business:

### Backup and Storage

Cloud services are an excellent solution to the issue of storage and backup for small businesses. [Carbonite](#), for example, is a backup service for PC’s and laptops that works in the background whenever you are connected to the internet to continually update your data. Your files are encrypted for extra security. If your PC or laptop is stolen or destroyed, you simply login and download your files to a new hard drive.

### Communications

Videoconferencing saves you on travel costs and carbon miles. [Skype](#) has recently entered the videoconferencing and desktop sharing markets – and as Skype is free and has the most intuitive interface, it’s likely to dominate the market. [WebEx](#) and [GoToMeeting](#) are also established desktop sharing and conferencing tools worth checking out.

### CRM:

[Salesforce.com](#) is a rapidly growing cloud computing company distributing a range of business and social enterprise software. It is best known for its outstanding CRM system that includes a range of functions such as managing sales, marketing campaigns and reports.

### File Transfer:

[Dropbox](#) is now the most popular tool for sharing and storing files online. You simply download the Dropbox application to your PC, iPad or smartphone and invite your team members to share the folders of your choice. Dropbox stores up to 2 Gb data for free.

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### Graphic Design and ad hoc services:

If you're on a shoestring, online print services such as [moo.com](http://moo.com) can be a quick way to create business cards, postcards and promotional material. Yahoo, Google, Mr Site and Wordpress provide tools and templates that allow you to build basic web sites and online stores yourself – you usually just pay a small annual subscription fee. And if you need a graphic designer to develop your logo, business stationary or Wordpress themes , you can try submitting a brief to [99designs](http://99designs) or [Odesk](http://Odesk) – for a relatively low fee, hundreds of designers will bid on your job.

### Shared business tools:

[Google apps](http://Google apps) are proving to be a good way to collaborate on documents, spreadsheets, calendaring and email. You can also add extra tools such as a shared company-wide or project-based “wiki” to improve the transfer of knowledge between staff in different areas of the world. [Microsoft Office 365](http://Microsoft Office 365), currently in its beta form, is already winning accolades for small businesses on a budget. It offers a very wide range of business tools, including generous storage space, web site building tools and the ability to access, view and edit Word, Excel, Powerpoint and OneNote files.

Hopefully this gives you an idea of the range of options available ‘in the cloud’. You should do your own research and compare services to choose the right one for your business.

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