

Clouds of Many Colors

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The concept of moving applications and/or processes to the cloud is a dream of every business. This move can result in cost reduction, higher mobility and scalability that can be challenging with current on premise (“on-prem”) infrastructure solutions. Unfortunately many of these dreams have turned into nightmares. Every cloud platform is shaded in many colors and knowing that they are not all white and fluffy is something every business needs to understand. There are ways to make this process less daunting, but it does require you to do some homework first.

When trying to decide what is needed, evaluating the current topology is a great first step. Every map has a legend, and using colors to separate one important piece from another is helpful for guidance. Taking a critical piece of business and moving it to the cloud can have direct or indirect effects. Gaining better insight into this topology and how each application interacts with one another is the first step to a successful implementation. The first step is to identify the systems that feed or are consumed by the piece that is moving. Nothing beats an electronic scan to see how things interact, but this only gains part of the overall picture. Including the use of architectural resources is a good way to help identify pieces that are known to the environment, but may not be picked up on a scan. Even with these resources, they are never 100% accurate and need to be supported by other information. It is critical to know that even with an on premise solution the colors on the map vary greatly.

In addition to identifying integration points, you also need to consider intangibles such as administration of data, user connectivity, business partner impacts, security impacts and other key pieces to make the application work. If you move away from an on premise solution, how will these interact or work in the future? Keeping in mind that moving to the cloud does not mean these go away, they are just handled differently, and how they are handled can differ with each cloud vendor.

Now that you know what you want your piece of the cloud to be colored, understand what it is that separates one color from another. This process can be time consuming and requires dedication to the details. The differences between cloud platforms, even though they seem small, can have large impacts to your business. Items such as user administration are vastly different and sometimes require a lot of data from the existing on premise solution. These do take time to work through and coordinate.

Performing evaluations of on premise versus cloud is a key decision point when making platform investment decisions. If this is your first move to the cloud it is highly recommended that you find an experienced partner to help you with the journey. They will make the journey easier and more bearable now and in the future.

As Gilbert Chesterton said "There are no rules of architecture for a castle in the clouds".