Reasons you should take your small business into the cloud

Cloud computing is the buzzword of the moment and many small business owners are starting to get excited about its promise. From a few early adopters, the cloud is now ready to burst into the mainstream of the SME market.

In 2012, just 9% of SMEs were using cloud services, and in 2014, the number has climbed to 22%, according to research from World Wide Worx. But SME adoption of the cloud is sure to explode as bandwidth increases, connectivity costs fall, and a new generation of digital entrepreneurs move into business, according to Ivan Epstein, co-founder of Softline and CEO of Sage AAMEA (Australia, Asia, Middle East and Africa).

"As a younger generation comes into the workforce, they are looking to use business IT resources online and on-demand in the same way as they use services such as Gmail and Dropbox," says Epstein. Cloud computing is essentially all about the move away from buying a software suite that you install on your computer towards accessing the software you need over the Internet and on a Web browser, wherever you are.

This way of working has a large number of direct benefits for small businesses.

According to Epstein, five good reasons why you should consider the cloud are:

1. **Less infrastructure and maintenance**: With a cloud-based software application, the responsibility for IT maintenance, software upgrades and any system issues lies with the service provider. As such, you escape the need for time-consuming and often expensive IT maintenance. You and your team can focus on your core business.

2. **Flexibility to scale up or scale down your business**: Cloud-based software can be accessed on a pay-as-you-go model, allowing you to increase your use of the service as your business grows, and also to decrease your spend if you need to scale down. This is particularly useful if you have variable staffing needs - you can issue and pay for as many payslips as you require that week or month, rather than being trapped in a fixed cost.

3. **Moving to the cloud is easy**: There is no hardware or infrastructure that needs to be installed. As soon as you pay for the product online, you can get started. Many cloud-based software applications cater for non-expert users. Sage One, for example, is written in simple, everyday language, meaning that you do not need to be a trained accounting or payroll professional to get up and running.

4. **Increased security**: Cloud computing can be more secure than traditional IT. Established cloud suppliers invest vast amounts of money into securing their applications and have technology infrastructures beyond the means of any small business. There's also less risk of losing data stored on a laptop or a USB stick because everything is stored in the cloud and not on your devices.

5. **Better collaboration, more flexibility**: Cloud computing allows you to work anytime and anywhere - just so long as you have an Internet connection and a device with a modern web browser. Your people can collaborate closely, accessing and working on the same documents in real time.