

# Five Ways to Leverage Cloud Computing

How this tech trend can benefit learning • BY BRANDON HALL, PH.D.



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Cloud computing is a resource that makes data and applications of its architecture available via a utility-based, pay-for-what-you-use model.

The essential characteristics of cloud computing, based on an ever-evolving U.S. government definition, are:

- On-demand self-service.
- Broad network access.
- Resource pooling.
- Rapid elasticity.
- Measured service.

Service models include software as a service (SaaS), platform as a service (PaaS) and infrastructure as a service (IaaS). These service model divisions provide an easier way to understand cloud computing than a catch-all that can include managed hosting, Google and a mobile device such as a BlackBerry.

The model we see most frequently in the learning space is SaaS (pronounced “sass”), with some systems now offering a PaaS solution. The cloud SaaS model means applications are accessible via a Web browser and mostly managed and controlled by the provider of the application. These solutions can include learning management systems, learning content management systems, e-learning authoring tools, synchronous learning platforms and collaborative “social” e-learning tools.

There are five ways cloud computing is making an impact on workplace learning.

1. **Create online courses anytime, collaboratively on the Web.** “In the United Nations Public Administration Network, our subject-matter experts are widely scattered around the world, and many stakeholders are involved in developing and approving our online courses,” said Deniz Susar, a public administration officer in the Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). “For us, a Web-based solution overcomes issues with collaboration, timely approvals and access. We used a Web-based authoring tool and at the same time made content security manageable with all the content being in one place, instead of on a dozen desktops.”
2. **Improve the speed of deployment and management of e-learning course development.** Cathy

Matysiak of Coast Capital Savings found that using a Web-based e-learning authoring tool allowed completion of projects on extremely tight deadlines. The instructional design team was able to divide and conquer the job synchronously. That is, the instructional designers and content experts could work on sections of the course at the same time as an outside graphic designer. Leaving notes in the system for each other in different colors allowed them all to communicate effectively — and the work didn’t stop. “It was like magic!” Matysiak said.

3. **Save nonessential IT time and resources associated with installed systems.** “By using a software as service (SaaS) learning management system service model, we’re free from concerns about managing technical details that aren’t within our core competency as a business — [such as] security, system performance and hardware,” said Steven Brewer, training and development manager at The Philadelphia Insurance Companies. “That’s all taken care of for us, and so [it] saves us significant amounts of time and resources over installed options. We’re also more easily able to take advantage of new features and system upgrades.”
4. **Access new types of applications for learning on demand.** “Our customers are less inclined to sit in a classroom for a full day or several days,” said Kevin Kearney, product line manager for Storage Protocol Products, LeCroy PSG. “Providing them a menu of brief video tutorials, available via an on-demand online technical training community they can choose from, gives us a way to deliver modular trainings that fit specific interests and time constraints.”
5. **Gain greater agility in the e-learning creation process.** Rob Clift Sr., marine outreach coordinator for the National Parks Conservation Association, developed an innovative solution to the lack of boating education in a very unique body of water called Florida Bay. “I was able to create an interactive, Web-based education course without spending an enormous amount of capital,” Clift said. “I was also able to collaborate with developers more than 5,000 miles away just like we were in the same city.”

Cloud computing is becoming an effective and efficient model for many organizations. Is the cloud in your future? [CLO](#)