

By Patrick Ndegwa;

- *Businesses now accept that the future of organising, processing and presenting their data is in the cloud*

There's been a definite shift around the discussion about the cloud in Africa. Businesses now accept that the future of organising, processing and presenting their data is in the cloud. And with services like cloud-based email, many companies are already using this innovative technology – whether they realise it or not. The conversation has changed from asking 'what is cloud technology?' to looking at how it can be harnessed to achieve business success.

Organisations need to be able to adapt at the same speed as this new technology and take advantage of the opportunities it presents. This will ensure business continuity and resilience in the long term. So what's next for the cloud?

The future of cloud computing: opportunities for Africa

The Internet of Things (<https://bit.ly/2QC4iyt>) is set to become even more prominent, with companies able to automate and optimise more processes as connected 'smart' machines are used. Interconnected systems mean that business processes and actual equipment will be linked to ensure ease of access and optimisation. This has the power to significantly improve efficiency for businesses that can get it right. This could include inventory systems that automatically order more stock when levels are low; smart machines that notify you before a part needs to be replaced; or logistics tracking that optimises routes and delivery based on orders and current traffic congestion. As we progress into this digital world of work, systems will become more interlinked and intertwined, providing opportunities for companies that are ready to take advantage.

Furthermore, the cloud enables remote working and service provision, regardless of where employees or organisations are located. This opens up business opportunities as distance from customers and clients is no longer a stumbling block. African companies can offer their services to a wider market – and in turn use additional services – as a result of a digitally connected world. The same applies to workers; employees can search for jobs nationally and internationally, as opposed to simply searching for opportunities in their immediate area.

Business flexibility and scalability will be key to enabling growth while reducing

unnecessary costs as a result of more streamlined operating systems and access to more markets and a wider range of service providers.

### Ensuring the safety and security of the business

The importance of security in this new cloud-connected world cannot be stressed enough. As more data is moved to a cloud environment, businesses that don't take security seriously become more susceptible to data breaches.

User rights need to be properly managed and the relevant software put into place to prevent cyberattacks and data leaks. In addition to this, each individual accessing a system affects the safety of the wider network, so employee training is vital. Accessing and managing data remotely will need to become a priority. The constant influx of data that is being collected and stored needs to be organised and used strategically. Regular backups are crucial in ensuring that information is safe and easily accessible should the original data be deemed at risk. This will ensure business continuity and reduce downtime.

Companies that stand to win will be those that partner with cloud providers that can help them put the right security measures in place.

### Adapting to a cloud-driven world of business

Research indicates that by 2025 (<https://bit.ly/2ELzsRc>), all of the world's data is expected to increase by five times. This data is estimated to be worth around 123.2 billion USD. In addition to this, the mobile cloud services market will be worth an estimated 95 billion USD by 2024. This trend also applies to Africa.

As Internet usage in Africa grows (<https://bit.ly/32Kf5MJ>), so does the amount of data created – as well as the value of that data. Accessing these huge amounts of data won't be the biggest challenge – making sense of it will be. Companies that can collect, collate and analyse the sheer volume of data generated every day by their customers, employees and other stakeholders stand to gain a lot. If you aren't organising your data and using it strategically, you will be left behind.

As we look to the future, the importance of partnering with a provider that can assist your business in meeting its operational needs to remain a top priority. A forward-thinking cloud partner can help your business plan for the future, while making the most of the latest innovative technology.

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