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Don't fear the cloud

"People ... especially people in positions of power ... have invested a tremendous amount of effort and time to get where they are. They really don't want to hear that we're on the wrong path, that we've got to shift gears and start thinking differently."

— DAVID SUZUKI

I am a staunch proponent of cloud computing and strongly believe it is the future of computing for the legal profession.

Granted, legal cloud computing platforms and services present a number of thorny ethical and security issues, but legal cloud computing providers are very responsive and receptive to the very valid concerns raised by lawyers in that regard.

In its current form, cloud computing for lawyers is not perfect, but it's a viable alternative to traditional desktop software for many lawyers, especially solos and small firms. As the technology and products improve, the technology will become a more palatable alternative for large and small firms alike.

Of course, that's just my opinion — and it's one that I express often. When I do so, I am generally met with skepticism from most lawyers — a reaction I've become quite used to.

When I discuss my vision of cloud computing in the legal field with legal IT personnel, however, the reaction I generally encounter is one that can only be described as downright hostility.

At first, I was puzzled by the phenomenon. Now realize it's simply a matter of self-preservation for those folks.

They're wary of emerging cloud computing technologies because of a very real and vested interest in clinging to the status quo, since the mass adoption of cloud computing by law firms threatens the existence of their job functions as they now exist.

As Nicholas Carr explains in "The Big Switch," the future of in-house IT personnel is questionable as businesses transition to



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using cloud computing platforms and storing their data in the cloud: "In the long run, the IT department is unlikely to survive, at least not in its familiar form. It will have little left to do once the bulk of business computing shifts out of private data centers and into 'the cloud.' Business units and even individual employees will be able to control the processing of information directly without the need for legions of technical specialists."

The gradual shift toward cloud computing does not mean IT professionals will be out of work. Rather, it simply means they must be flexible, openminded and willing to adapt to the changing IT landscape. IT jobs are not disappearing, they are merely changing.

For example, while demands for in-house IT personnel continue to decline, demand for virtualization pros skilled in cloud computing has increased by 21 percent from last year, according to recent studies analyzing job hiring data and classified ads.

The bottom line is that the future is not bleak for in-house legal IT personnel — it's simply different. Cloud computing represents change on a grand scale and while the mass adoption of cloud computing platforms threatens the jobs of some IT staff, it will likely transform the jobs of others and promises to alter the internal structure of law firms.

No doubt, change and uncertainty can be scary, but desperately clinging to the status quo out of fear does a disservice to both the legal and IT professions and, ultimately, will fail.

A better alternative is to embrace change and find new opportunities in the emerging legal technology landscape.

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