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## 3 Steps To Identifying The Right Cloud Solution

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With the public, private, and hybrid cloud options available, and several factors to consider before making a move, the whole thing can seem overwhelming. But Michael Collier, a Cloud Solution Architect at Microsoft, has one question before you get to any of that: “why?”

Collier has partnered with a lot of businesses that come to him saying, “Hey, I want to go to the cloud.” He’ll continue to ask “why” until he gets to the core of the problem. Answers such as “my CIO said I had to go to the cloud” or “our competitors are doing it” will elicit more “whys” from Collier. “Going there because someone thinks it’s cool or you read it in a magazine doesn’t get you anywhere,” he says. “There’s no real business justification there for going to the cloud.”

Michael Collier, Cloud Solution Architect for Microsoft

“I think you really need a problem or a pain point you’re trying to solve to make it a worthwhile endeavor,” Collier explains. Answers such as “we can’t scale fast enough,” “maintaining servers is too expensive,” or “we need to modernize our application portfolio” are the types of problems Collier is looking to solve. “Once you have that problem, you can start small and ramp up from there,” he continues.

For businesses that don’t have a specific problem to address, Collier works with partners during envisioning sessions to ferret out what’s viable given the current landscape—what he refers to as the “art of the possible.” “We’ll talk about their business, what they do,” he says. “We’ll tease out things in the business and the industry that could apply to the cloud. Not everything belongs in the cloud,” he admits.

As far as which solution is best, “the architect in me says it depends on what you want to do,” says Collier. Good options for the public cloud are often public-facing web products, such as a corporate website, a social presence, and mobile applications. “Cloud and mobile go well together,” he adds. “Or things you do that need burst computing—like if you just need a bunch of computers to do financial modeling or graphic rendering. The cloud can give you a high-performance computing space if you don’t have the room to do it on-premises.”

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money, and energy into the solution that  
makes most sense for your business—not just  
move to the cloud for the sake of it.*

An on-premises solution is best for something like a database workload that uses specialized hardware and infrastructure that aren't available in the public cloud. Or if you want more control at a physical level, you may keep data and applications in a private cloud. "That doesn't mean you can't connect the two together in a hybrid manner," he explains.

"As much as I think the big providers would love to see everything going to the public cloud, I think you're going to see the hybrid model," Collier postulates. "There are always going to be cases when things need to be in a private cloud. Plus, people have huge investments already on-premises, so there's no way they're going to move all that, whether for political or financial reasons." Using a hybrid model, businesses can have the best of both worlds. "You have the ability to run and manage things on-premises, then take it and run in the public cloud," explains Collier. "In some ways, the end user should never know—it's irrelevant to them where the solution is running."

Collier notes that the ability to transition back and forth is helpful to developers, who may do development and testing in the public cloud because they need the infrastructure that bigger cloud providers can offer at an appealing price. "Then they may move back to on-premises for production. Or they start small on-premises and then realize, 'Hey, I really need the flexibility the public cloud provides. I need to be able to turn on and off servers every night and save cost, spin up databases quickly,' and they may move more and more into the cloud."

To start, though, Collier recommends educating yourself on some of the basics of what the public cloud does and does not provide. Too often Collier sees businesses decide to move a particular piece of business to the cloud "and then they actually move things and it doesn't do what they thought it would do." Do your due diligence and see if it's feasible and, if so, how easy or hard it will be to make the move.

Collier also reiterates the need to find out what the pain point is, which he summarizes as "Why do I want to do this?" "A former manager of mine called it the **5 whys**," he says. By asking why several times, you can dig into the real reason you want to move to the cloud and design the cloud solution—public, private, hybrid—that best fits your business's specific scenario.

Finally, Collier recommends bringing in a partner that can help you with creative problem solving. And if identifying your pain point doesn't come easily, or you have several people in your business petitioning for a move to the cloud without more rationale than "all the cool businesses are doing it," you may want to bring a partner on board sooner rather than later to get a broad perspective on the options available. Your goal should be to invest your time, money, and energy into the solution that makes the most sense for your business—not just move to the cloud for the sake of it.

*Michael Collier is a Cloud Solution Architect at Microsoft and the co-author of Microsoft Azure Essentials: Fundamentals of Azure, [a free e-book](#) for developers and IT pros new to cloud computing.*

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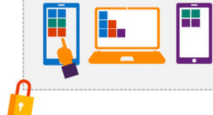


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