



Getting Started with Cloud Computing:



A LITA Guide

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Heather Lea Moulaison
Editors**

with a Foreword by Roy Tennant

Guide #16

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Foreword

From one perspective, the history of computing can be viewed as a cyclical gyration of centralization versus decentralization of computing power. The first machines were too expensive for any organizations or individuals except government agencies and eventually very large businesses. Centralization was broken by the advent of the personal computer, which put computing power in the hands of individuals for the first time. The era of the minicomputer consolidated decentralization, as each individual organization installed “dumb” terminals lashed to a minicomputer, including the library where I worked in 1983.

Then came the Internet, which provided a way to interconnect all of these nodes. This enabled another wave of centralization, as we increasingly accessed servers so far away and anonymous that we never knew where they actually sat. To some degree, cloud computing represents taking centralization to its logical conclusion. With cloud computing, the very idea of “clients” and “servers” fades into the background. You have a phone, or a pad device, or a laptop, or a desktop, and it is able to do many wondrous things because it is seamlessly integrated over the network with farms of servers that operate transparently and that automatically grow with demand.

It is indeed a brave new world we live in, and this book demonstrates that librarians are not only aware of these changes but are already using them to more effectively and efficiently fulfill their needs and the needs of their users. In that way this book is both a lesson and an inspiration. It is an inspiration as it demonstrates the resiliency of librarians in acquiring new skills and applying new technologies to serve the needs of their users ever better. It is a lesson because in these pages are both foundationally instructive pieces as well as case studies of exactly how to bring these new technologies to bear in your own organizations.

This is no different from the era in which I became a librarian, when the Internet was beginning to transform our world. Both instructional explication and case studies were needed, to illustrate both what could be accomplished with this new tool as well as exactly how librarians were using it. Therefore, you now have in your hands the chapter and verse on what cloud computing is and how to use it effectively in your library.

For me the most powerful aspect of cloud computing is that it enables libraries to stop dealing with technical issues that have nothing to do with their day-to-day mission and services. Cloud computing offers the ability to simply requisition technological resources that can expand as required to meet expanding needs while requiring little or nothing from the library providing the service. Additionally, using cloud computing services it is possible to get a full-featured website going in minutes—I've done this multiple times myself using Amazon's EC2 service and I'm still astonished. It quite literally has never been easier to get a website going than it is today.

So within these pages rests the future of libraries. We must get out of the business of buying, configuring, installing, and maintaining servers unless we absolutely must do so. Otherwise, we should be simply and easily requisitioning services from the cloud, and immediately and effectively putting them into service. After all, this is exactly what everyone else is doing.

Roy Tennant
Senior Program Officer
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