Applications

Most often referred to as *Software as a Service* (SaaS), fully functional applications can be delivered via the cloud. One of the best-known examples is *Google Apps*, which is a suite of cloud-based office applications designed to compete directly with Microsoft's traditional office applications, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, and Outlook. Google Apps can also replace the back-end software often used to support Microsoft Office, including Exchange and SharePoint.

When you use a cloud-based application, you don't have to worry about any of the details that are commonly associated with running an application on your network, such as deploying the application and applying product upgrades and software patches. Cloud-based applications usually charge a small monthly fee based on the number of users running the software, so costs are low.

Also, as a cloud-based application user, you don't have to worry about providing the hardware or operating system platform on which the application will run. The application provider takes care of that detail for you, so you can focus simply on developing the application to best serve your users' needs. Your users can access the application using any operating system that has a standard web browser.

Platforms

Also referred to as *Platform as a Service* (PaaS), this class of service refers to providers that give you access to a remote virtual operating platform on which you can build your own applications.

At the simplest level, a PaaS provider gives you a complete, functional remote virtual machine that's fully configured and ready for you to deploy your applications to. If you use a web provider to host your company's website, you're already using PaaS: Most web host providers give you a functioning Linux system, fully configured with all the necessary servers, such as Apache or MySQL. All you have to do is build and deploy your web application on the provider's server.

More-complex PaaS solutions include specialized software that your custom applications can tap to provide services such as data storage, online order processing, and credit card payments. One of the best-known examples of this type of PaaS provider is Amazon.


REMEMBER

When you use PaaS, you take on the responsibility of developing your own custom applications to run on the remote platform. The PaaS provider takes care of the details of maintaining the platform itself, including the base operating system and the hardware on which the platform runs.