Ever since the internet boom of a decade ago, we’ve celebrated our geek elite, and the rise of Cloud has proven no exception. But before we all go waving our MIT rings in the air and singing Kumbaya, realize that there are folks making some serious money using the cloud (defined as hosted virtual systems that scale up and down fast, with self-service) without ever seeking approval from Corporate IT staff. Are you missing out on these Top 10 Non-IT Business Uses of the Cloud?

**10. Productivity / Responsiveness:  Stop Annoying IT, use Self-Service (outsourced) Business Systems**

Working “helpdesk” is often one of the most loathed and feared roles in IT.  In fact, as one frustrated staffer said, “if it weren’t for these doggone customers, we might actually get something done!”. Consider; CRM, HR, Email, Sales Demos – all headaches for IT to maintain, but crucial for business functions.  Why not have a dedicated, scalable, full-time provider like Salesforce.com, Gmail, or Success Factors handling these – with no installation, pay-as-you go models, what’s not to love.

**9. Collaboration:  Who needs phones, meeting rooms, overhead projectors and labs?**

In the evolution of the internet as a way of sharing your ideas with others (and them with you), first it came text and images (aka web pages); then chat, then powerpoint and whiteboards – now, complete computing systems.  Whether it’s WebEx and GoToMeeting for executives, or training systems for staff, it’s not something you want to build yourself – and it is something any single individual with a credit card can add, in units of one person or one company at a time.

**8. Analytics:  Harness the Wisdom of Clouds… ah, Crowds.**

If a thousand monkeys typed at a thousand typewriters for a thousand years, they probably still wouldn’t produce the works of Shakespeare. But if you can hand a thousand people a thousand PCs for a thousand minutes, at fractions of a cent per user, you can get answers to everything from consumer preferences to who’s the latest hot media star to watch… second by second. Twitter search, anyone?

**7. Storage:   Back up Everything**

User and IT headaches: compliance, crashed hard drives, employees leaving with data. Solution – for litigation, compliance, employee turnover, or simply guaranteeing that you never ever lose those bachelorette party photos, Mozy (EMC), cTera, and others let you trickle-charge or even access direct share drives in the Cloud. It’s an infinitely sized and infinitely reliable hard drive!

**6. Insight:  Spying on your channel & stalking customers… that is, information-gathering to improve**

We’re sure no reseller would ever deliberately overcommit to sales numbers and accounts they’d call on, just as we’re sure most customers really mean to eventually buy from vendors. That said, “watch the hands, not the mouth” as they say in the magic trade. From Google’s tailored ads, to asking channel to register deals and do demos using your systems, once you have end-users directly accessing systems in your cloud, you can watch what they do (and make choices based on it). No worries about running out of space or overcommitting to tasks that don’t work out – in the cloud, you can scale up or down whenever you want.

**5. Communication:  VoIP, Virtual PBXs, and Skype, oh my.**

Once, a long time ago, you could tell how successful a company was by whether they had matching phone and fax prefixes, an answering machine or live receptionist, and extensions or direct dial numbers.  You could even tell where they were by the areacode. But with the advent of the Cloud, even a single person can have many departments, different voice greetings, and add or remove employees for dollars per month, or less.  Google Voice, Onebox, and others make scaling cheap & easy.

**4. Showrooms:  Beats those portable tents any day.**

So you want to sell shoes, you say? On the internet? What a silly idea… but since it doesn’t cost much to get a listing on Amazon, a Paypal shopping cart, and the instant expandability (and shrinkability) of the Cloud, well, you can build a showroom for your shoes, and expand from 1 guy to a billion-dollar company (and make the infrastructure vanish quickly, no fixed costs, when another giant buys you out). Not that such things have ever happened. We’re just saying.

**3. Entertainment: Doing the YouTube, Hulu-Hulu (and iStore) dance**

Are you an undiscovered star? With millions of viewers and users, YouTube and iStore and others are to talented individual s what the old variety shows used to be in person. Why is this Cloud-related? Only the fractional cost and radical flexibility of the underlying infrastructure make it feasible for people to self-list, self-promote, and scale in the time needed if they’re an overnight success. So now fads can get big and die even faster. Imagine, what if the Pet Rock had been cloud-based?

**2. Innovation: On the Cloud, no-one knows you’ve got the finances of a dog.**

The old aphorism was that “on the internet, no-one knows if you’re a dog”.  One of the largest barriers to startup companies has always been capital for infrastructure. Yet Cloud fixes this – you can access virtually the same resources as a larger company in seconds and on a low-limit credit-card budget. The result? New business innovation from college students and younger.

**1. Ubiquitous Business Computing:  Turn your iPad into a CloudPC**

The Cloud is accessed through a web browser much of the time – and so finally begins to relegate the OS to the invisible realms of firmware.  People don’t use operating systems; we use applications. So why shouldn’t I just use my word processing software via the web? When iPad users can log into their Windows-based PC desktop in the Cloud (invisibly running on a Linux hypervisor), we’re serving users instead of vendors. Not a bad thing.