In this article, we'll look at 10 reasons to consider using Windows Azure as your cloud computing platform.

**1: Familiarity of Windows**

Azure is based on Windows, so you can write applications in the same programming languages you've used for Windows apps: Visual Basic, C++, C#, etc. You can also use familiar tools such as Visual Studio, along with ASP.NET and other familiar Windows technologies. This makes it easy for organizations to find developers who already have the skills to create applications for the Azure platform. And because the Azure environment is much like the standard Windows environment, it's easier to create a cloud version of an existing Windows application.

**2: 64-bit Windows VMs**

Applications running on Azure run in virtual machines, with each instance of the app running in its own VM on the 64-bit Windows Server 2008 operating system. The hypervisor on which they run is designed specifically for the cloud. You don't have to supply your own VMs or deal with managing and maintaining the OS because apps are developed using Web role instances or worker role instances that run in their own VMs. The apps interoperate with other Azure components through a Windows Azure agent that runs in each VM. With Azure, you can focus on the code and don't have to worry about the hardware.

**3: Azure SDK**

Microsoft provides the Windows Azure software development kit (SDK), which includes a version of the Azure environment you can run on your own computer. It's called the Windows Azure Development Fabric, and it includes the Azure agent and storage. You can work locally when developing and debugging an application and then move it to the cloud. You can [download the tools for Vista Studio 2008 and 2010, along with the SDK](http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=6967ff37-813e-47c7-b987-889124b43abd&displaylang=en), from Microsoft.

**4: Scalability and flexibility**

Using Azure, you can easily create applications that run reliably and scale from 10 to 10 thousand or even 10 million users -- without any additional coding. Azure Storage provides scalable, secure, performance-efficient storage services in the cloud.

After you create a Web app, you can specify the number of processors for the application to use. If the application needs to scale up to meet growing demand, it's easy to change the settings to use more processors. The "pay as you go/pay as you grow" approach lets you bring your new apps to market sooner and respond more quickly to changes in your customers' needs.

**5: Cost benefits and pricing model**

Taking advantage of resources in the cloud allows you to decrease your costs for building and expanding your on-premises resources. You can also reduce the cost of IT administration because the hardware is being taken care of for you, off-premises. The cost of creating, testing, debugging, and distributing Web-based applications goes down because you have to pay only for the computer processing time and storage space you need at a given time.

Windows Azure pricing will be based on consumption, with a per-hour fee that's dependent on the size of the instance for Azure computing services and per-month or per-transaction fees for Azure storage services based on data size. For pricing details,[see the Microsoft Web site](http://www.microsoft.com/windowsazure/pricing/).

**6: Data center in the cloud**

SQL Azure provides organizations with all the benefits of an enterprise-class data center without the hassle, headaches, and cost of maintaining such an entity. You get high availability and reliability with redundant copies of your data and automatic failover. No more worries about backing up data yourself.

It's a relational database model that stores data in the same manner as SQL Server (tables, indexes, views) and thus will be familiar to Windows DBAs, but your SQL Azure Server is spread across multiple physical computers for more flexibility. For information about the differences between SQL Azure and SQL Server, see [Similarities and Differences - SQL Azure vs. SQL Server](http://go.microsoft.com/?linkid=9692818).

**7: Support resources**

Because Azure uses the same familiar tools and technologies as other Windows platforms, you can take advantage of the well-established support structure within Microsoft and company-provided resources, such as TechNet and MSDN, along with the huge ecosystem of Windows developers outside the company. There will always be someone to turn to when you have questions or problems.

**8: Interoperability**

With Azure, you can develop hybrid applications that allow your on-premises applications to use cloud services, such as the cloud database and storage services. Communications services work between on-premises applications and the cloud, as well as mobile devices.

Azure supports open standards and Internet protocols, such as HTTP, XML, SOAP, and REST. There are SDKs for Java, PHP, and Ruby, for applications written in those languages, and Azure tools for Eclipse.