# STORAGE
FAQS

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CHOOSING A SOLUTION AND PROVIDER

Creative ITC

Is your storage reaching end of life or becoming obsolete? Maybe you're simply looking at the options that are now available as you reconsider data storage costs, in-house IT resource and your office or datacentre footprint? Those options have certainly expanded over recent years, with the explosion of the cloud.

If your organisation has been sceptical about moving to cloud in the past, now is probably a good time to review the storage landscape as there is likely to be a better, more cost-effective solution out there that meets your capacity, performance and security needs. If your organisation has already dipped its toes into cloud, you might be wondering if you're getting the best from your current provider or if there is a way to ease the burden of cloud storage management on your team.

Deciding which solution and choosing a managed service provider are no easy tasks, and the pressure to get it right – for the sake of customer and employee experience, never mind the bottom line – can be huge. This FAQ guide aims to help with some questions to ask before you choose a solution or an MSP for your storage needs.
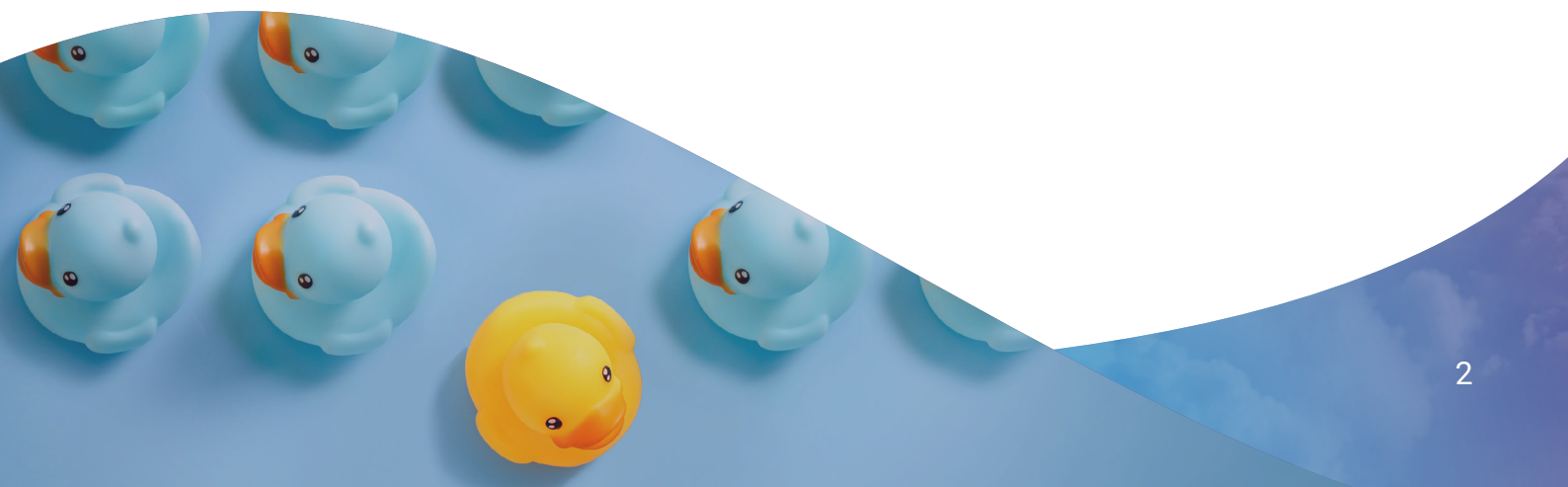
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC CLOUD?

At the end of the day, any cloud is just a collection of servers. In the public cloud, these servers are housed in large data centres that are usually owned and operated by the behemoths of the digital age – AWS, Google, Microsoft Azure. You neither control nor have access to these servers. In a private cloud, the servers are owned by you or a private cloud provider. With private cloud – as with on-premise storage – you know where your data is stored. Which leads us on to:

WHERE WILL YOUR DATA BE STORED?

As mentioned above, calling it 'the cloud' might give the wrong impression – your data still has to be stored in a physical location. With public cloud it's not always clear where that is. If your cloud provider stores your data in a different country, it may be subject to different laws around access and control.

If your organisation has to use UK-based or EU-based data storage for regulatory reasons, for example, this can be an issue. But it doesn't mean you absolutely must take care of storage in-house. Any reputable Storage-as-a-Service (STaaS) provider will be able to tell you where your data is stored, and offer the option of on-premise if you still need it.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE VISIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY?

If you decide to use public cloud you will be managing the cloud resources in-house and paying to use them. You will need to know – and stay on top of – exactly what those resources are, as well as other information like: How many accounts do you have? Have your developers added machines, new functionality, or external connections? Who put that data or application there? Are you sure it's configured properly? Does it have vulnerabilities?

And with anyone in your organisation able to sign up to public cloud services, it's even trickier to keep track. You need visibility to be able to identify potential issues and threats so that you can act on them, not to mention for compliance with laws and standards. Working with an MSP makes visibility and transparency much easier to achieve. Many, like Creative ITC, will have consolidated dashboards for straightforward monitoring and analytics.

WHAT SECURITY CAPABILITIES DO YOU NEED?

A major factor holding many organisations back when it comes to cloud adoption is security. Using a cloud storage provider means essentially entrusting your data to a third party, and the concern that they may not always keep it safe is understandable.

If you choose public cloud, the onus is on you to ensure data backup, protection and security are up to scratch as ultimate responsibility for your data rests with your organisation – not the cloud provider. This all comes at an additional cost and requires skilled resource. It's also important to note that anyone within your organisation can sign up to public cloud storage, leading to cloud sprawl and reducing your ability to manage the environment effectively.

That said, no single architecture or environment fits all. If you manage your storage in-house, you'll have to look at the cybersecurity needs of all your applications and data sets (as well as doing a cost comparison) before deciding on public cloud, private cloud, on-premise, or the right mix. Employing a managed service provider's expertise is worthwhile in terms of their ability to analyse your business needs, existing footprint and the sensitivity of your data to make sure it's stored in the optimum environment with the right level of security.

When you're choosing a STaaS provider, they should also be happy to discuss the security measures they have in place, which may include anti-virus software, data encryption, firewalls, and routine security audits. At Creative ITC, we proudly adhere to proven processes and best practices like ISO 27001, the international information security standard.

HOW DOES IT STACK UP IN TERMS OF PRICE, OPERATING COSTS AND VALUE?

It's important to recognise the difference between these three in the context of choosing a storage solution and potentially a storage provider.

Based on price, public cloud is often perceived as a cheaper alternative to private cloud, but it can come with hidden or unexpected costs and must be carefully monitored and managed by your team to avoid your monthly bills spiralling out of control. Banner prices among hyperscalers are very competitive due to the economies of scale they work on, but you will need to look at each vendor's pricing structure very closely. Attractive headline costs are one thing, but the true cost of ownership needs to take into account including data transfer and egress fees, the price of unused and unhealthy instances, and the investment you will need to make in hiring or upskilling team members to manage all aspects of your storage. If you think the total potential cost still represents good value, you will need to know how a vendor charges their clients so you can figure out which pricing plan works best for your company. See our 'Common Storage Myths Debunked' for more on that.

Bringing down operating costs is a big driver for Storage-as-a-Service adoption in many organisations. This is not always a given when you are managing your environment in-house. When you pay a cloud or managed service provider for a fully managed service, you agree a service level agreement (SLA) and they run everything. Employing an MSP means you are no longer responsible for the day-to-day running of the storage, in contrast to public cloud which must be managed by your in-house team.

Choosing managed STaaS not only means eliminating the costs of carrying spare capacity, it also means real savings in terms of time and resources. Not to mention that they will go to great lengths to handle the complexities of optimising and customising storage solutions to suit your needs, on your behalf. This is the true value of a managed service. If you choose your provider wisely, you'll get good, honest advice, save hours on training, avoid costly mistakes and make the most of the storage you're paying for.

HOW EASY IS IT TO RIGHT-SIZE AND TO SCALE?

It's easy to get tripped up when it comes to right-sizing and then scaling your cloud services. Overprovisioning can result in costly wasted capacity, but is a way of hedging bets for those who would rather pay an outsized invoice than risk under-provisioning. The challenge is compounded by fluctuations in demand, when it might be painfully slow and expensive to scale up or difficult to scale down.

By working with a managed service provider like Creative ITC, you benefit from fast, cost-effective scaling with STaaS. You can save by not having to oversize your storage domains and carry the cost of spare capacity, and quickly spin-up in minutes and hours rather than days or weeks. We also include patch management to save you more time and money and ensure maximum uptime.

HOW DO THE STORAGE SYSTEM TIERS WORK?

A tiered system usually reduces your storage costs and is more efficient. By storing each data class with the minimum performance required, you avoid paying for higher performance storage than you need. The more tiers in the system, the more accurately you can classify your data. Within Creative's STaaS offering, any data that has not been accessed for 30 days is automatically moved to the cold tier. This means that you can still access it very quickly (in which case it moves back to the hot tier), but is a more cost-effective means of storing it than in the ultra-low latency, sub-millisecond hot tier. Our hot tier leverages all flash storage to speed up enterprise application performance and big data analytics, giving instant access to the most important data.

ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT?

If you decide to go ahead and choose a managed service provider, the SLA should be a key consideration in your process. This document sets out what the provider will do for you and what your responsibilities are, from what kind of data will be stored and how, to the security measures that will be in place. From most public cloud providers, you are likely to agree to standard terms of service with only the most basic levels of data protection and security.

WHAT LEVEL OF TECH SUPPORT IS PROVIDED?

Support may be covered in the SLA, but it's worthwhile checking what level of tech support is provided when you're choosing a vendor or service provider. Questions like when and how you can contact them may seem obvious, but you will almost certainly need to call on them at some point and if something goes wrong you'll wish you had the best in the business. In addition, you might want to check what support is provided in the initial installation – will they configure your storage space, and initiate and oversee the migration of the data from your legacy storage?

Hopefully this FAQ guide will give you some great pointers for choosing your next storage solution and unlocking the benefits of choosing the right managed service provider for your business.

If you would like to find out more about STaaS from Creative ITC, please contact:
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