

# Cloud Computing

**Martin De Saulles**

## Can you trust the cloud?

Over the last few months there have been a number of stories of hackers getting into high-profile cloud services that many of us have come to rely on for our daily work. Last summer Dropbox was hacked when a Dropbox employee left an unencrypted copy of a document on the service which contained the email addresses of thousands of users. Although the affected users only suffered spam in their inbox, it highlighted the vulnerability of cloud computing services and the basic human errors that often allow hackers in. Building thicker, stronger walls on a castle is pointless if there is an unsecured backdoor that nobody is guarding. While the impact of the Dropbox security breach was relatively benign, last summer's stealing of over six million passwords from LinkedIn was far more serious. The passwords were dumped on a Russian online forum for other users to download and although the passwords were hashed (changed into a series of letters and numbers by an algorithm) it did not take long for hundreds of thousands of them to be decoded. If a hacker with criminal intent finds out your username and password for one cloud service it is possible they will be able to use this data to access other services you use, some of which may contain particularly sensitive informa-

tion. This is made possible if you use the same password for accessing multiple services.

So what can you do to reduce the risk of hackers stealing your data or even impersonating you online? Here are some practical measures you can take immediately:

1. Use as many different passwords as you can for your cloud services. Keeping track of lots of passwords can be tricky but there are solutions out there. I use the free, open-source application called KeePass.
2. Use passwords that cannot easily be guessed i.e. don't use the name of your partner, pet or child. KeePass has an automatic password generator.
3. If you are storing particularly sensitive data with your cloud provider then consider enabling two-step authentication and encrypting your files. Google, Facebook, Dropbox, Amazon Web Services and Yahoo! mail offer two-step authentication which requires both a password and a one-time code to gain access. The one-time code is sent via SMS to your

mobile so adds another layer of security. Encrypting files can be a relatively complex process but, depending on the level of encryption, can make it almost impossible for hackers to do anything with your data if they gain access.

4. Make sure you have other copies of your files on physical devices that you control. if the worst comes to the worst and someone steals your online data at least you've still got an offline copy.

For most of us, the benefits of being able to access our data over the web outweighs the risks of losing it to hackers. Of course, the above advice only applies to individuals and small businesses. Larger organisations are unlikely to use services such as Dropbox or Google mail and will, or at least should, have their own security procedures and protocols for managing data.

### **Do you need a combined CRM/project management solution?**

Over the last several years I've experimented with a number of cloud-based CRM and task/project management solutions that I can use for both work and personal contacts and projects. A central problem has been that most of the CRM systems have not been able to do a good job of integrating projects and vice versa. One service that does a pretty good job of both is Insightly ([www.insightly.com](http://www.insightly.com)) that originally only worked within Google Apps. A year or so ago they made it possible to open an Insightly account even if you did not use Google Apps. I think this was a smart move and I would recommend any freelance

professional or small business that needs to manage a substantial contact list and is involved in multiple projects at once to consider it. The key features that I particularly like about Insightly are:

1. When you open an account you are given a unique email address which allows you to email data into your Insightly account. This is useful for creating a record of correspondence with contacts as adding your Insightly email address to the BCC field of any emails you send will automatically add that email to the contact's record. If your contact's email address is one that Insightly has not seen before, it will create a new record for you. Insightly will also automatically create a record for your contact's organisation based on the email address. It is easy to then log in to your account and edit records such as adding phone numbers and physical addresses.
2. Adding projects and breaking them down into tasks is easy and if you add colleagues to your Insightly account it is possible to allocate tasks to individuals. If you manage a sales pipeline then it is easy to create opportunities that can be linked to both contacts in the database and, if the sale is successful, can be turned into a project.
3. Files can be uploaded and attached to contacts, tasks, projects and opportunities. This is particularly useful when collaborating with colleagues via Insightly as you can be

sure you are all working to the same documents.

4. Price – most other similar cloud-based services offer a free entry-level account but the limits on how many contacts or projects you can manage often makes them impractical for real-world use. However, Insightly's free plan is relatively generous and allows up to three users to manage 2,500 contacts, 200 megabytes of file storage and create unlimited tasks, projects and opportunities. For a sole professional or very small business this might be sufficient. Prices do start to creep up if you need to upgrade with the most expensive package, which offers unlimited contacts, 200 users and 200 gigabytes of storage for \$299 per month.

It is also easy to download and backup your contact data, which is something I would recommend any user does on a regular basis.

If our esteemed editor will let me, I'll finish this column with a shameless plug for an e-book I published last month (*Cloud Computing Applications for Project Management*). This short guide compares the functionality and pricing of five widely-used project management solutions for freelancers, small businesses as well as larger organisations. It is available through the Kindle store for £1.53 (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Computing-Applications-Project-Management-ebook/dp/B00AWDWQF2/>).

*Martin De Saulles ([www.mdesaulles.net](http://www.mdesaulles.net)) is Principal Lecturer in information management at the University of Brighton*