



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on September 16, 2009

Fed Gov's Cloud Computing & Apps.gov

The federal government announced on September 15 that it will adopt cloud computing to cut costs and reduce the environmental impact of its computer systems. As a first step, the administration launched Apps.gov, an online shopping center for approved cloud computing services.



In simple terms, cloud computing refers to hosting software and data on central servers while making access available over the Internet. Websites that offer online e-mail, data storage, photo albums, blogs, or video sharing are all examples of cloud-based computing. Both the data and the application that accesses the data reside on central servers. Users need only Internet access and a web browser for the service to work.

Vivek Kundra, the Obama administration's Chief Information Officer, presented the cloud computing initiative at NASA's Ames Research Center. Kundra pointed to the Apps.gov website as the first major step toward having federal government agencies rely on cloud computing. Apps.gov will serve as a clearinghouse that enables agencies to find services that meet government standards.

As things stand now, federal agencies often go to the expense of setting up their own data centers, complete with servers and the IT staff to keep them running. For example, the Department of Homeland Security alone has 23 data centers. The federal government has an IT budget of \$76 billion dollars, according to Kundra, and more than \$19 billion of that goes toward infrastructure.

Kundra cited the Transportation Safety Administration's plan to establish its own blog at a cost of \$600,000. Consumer-oriented blog sites supported by ad revenue already allow blogs to be created for free. "Why should the government pay for and build infrastructure that is available for free?" Kundra said. "In these tough economic times, the federal government must buy smarter."

Since the government "has been building data center after data center," federal energy consumption has doubled from 2000 to 2006. "We cannot continue on this trajectory," Kundra declared, pointing out that cloud computing is the environmentally friendly thing to do.

While the idea of saving both money and the environment may be strong motivators in today's political climate, the adoption of cloud computing will take a long time and won't be a totally smooth ride. "There will be resistance for years to come, predicated upon culture," noted Bruce Hart, the chief operations officer with data center company Terremark Worldwide.

Security will be another major concern. Agencies will be reluctant to move sensitive data to computers not under their direct control. "We're going to see the word 'security' used as the counter-ammunition



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to [Kundra's] initiatives," Hart said. Hart should know something about security; he has served as deputy CIO for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Obviously, some military, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies will need to maintain their own data centers for classified information. But as technology, culture, and security issues are worked out over what will surely be many years, an interesting interplay between government and business may develop.

For instance, Hart's company, Terremark Worldwide, will perhaps benefit from his government connections to make a hefty profit. "Increasingly, we're going to find ourselves hosting larger applications and systems for larger organizations," Hart averred. He believes that Kundra's announcement and the Apps.gov website are "setting the stage for what could be a stunning achievement."

[PC World on September 15](#) recognized that other businesses will want to get a piece of the action. Google "said it would offer its own government cloud products beginning next year. The company expects to have Google Apps certified under FISMA (Federal Information Security Management Act) by that time, and will host it in U.S. data centers that are run by staffers with appropriate security clearances."

Speaking with reporters at the NASA event, Google cofounder Sergey Brin observed, "The U.S. government is probably the largest enterprise I know of." Sad, but true. While government IT officials could perhaps be commended for their newfound sense of fiscal responsibility, an even greater savings in time and money would be had by once again limiting the federal government's size and scope to constitutional boundaries.

As government and business intertwine with cloud computing, those supposedly silver clouds might obscure the problems of Big Government, and they may prove to have the dark lining of allowing that government to grow even bigger with the help of Big Business.

Photo: Vivek Kundra



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