7 QUESTIONS to Ask When Evaluating a Cloud Hosting Provider
Future planning can be a mixed bag for a small business. It can be both exhilarating and bit overwhelming to look forward and think about the vitality of your organization. Through one view, it’s a world of possibilities. Through another view, budgeting dollars are hard-earned and critical to your future success, so missteps are financially and strategically costly.

If you’re considering bringing QuickBooks desktop and it’s supporting applications into the cloud, you’re likely already aware of the benefits of cloud hosting. You know that a fully-managed infrastructure on which your data and applications run is more secure for you. You’re also probably looking forward to saving time by no longer having to install and maintain software on your local machine. And of course, there is the anytime, anywhere access to business-critical applications that cloud hosting provides.

Before adding cloud accounting to your roadmap, think about some of the key questions you should ask a potential partner.

1. **How Many Customers Do You Have?**

   We have this pegged at number one for a good reason – your reputation. If you trust your business operations to the cloud, you’ve put a part of your reputation at stake. That’s something that Right Networks takes very seriously, and you’ll want to ensure that any potential hosting provider does as well. Throughout our experience in bringing the cloud to 100,000 users, we’ve come to learn what it’s like working with small businesses. We know your challenges, how you like to work, and the importance of protecting your reputation by providing your customers with a good experience. Make sure a cloud partner knows your unique challenges as well by understanding how long, and how often, they’ve transition customers to the cloud.

2. **How Do You Handle Support?**

   Similarly, if you, or if one of your accounting professional runs into an issue, you want to ensure that there is a strong safety net in place. Does a potential hosting provider offer 24/7/365 support? Is it US-based? What are the other channels – email, chat? Read reviews online about the level of support. Too many negative interactions is a red flag.

3. **Where Do You Host Data?**

   Does this seem irrelevant? It might be until a natural disaster brings a state (or an entire coast) offline and your cloud provider has a presence there. Reliable hosting companies have more than one data center and redundancy in place so that, if one location does go offline, your data and the availability of your applications isn’t impacted.
4. What Is Your Availability and Uptime?

Premier hosting providers have extremely high uptimes and extremely low scheduled downtime. At Right Networks, we’re proud to offer 99.999% uptime with no planned downtime. Think about what downtime could mean to your business. You'll want to be sure that someone you trust to host your most critical applications also has best in class reliability.

5. What Is Your Backup Policy?

Data backups should be standard, of course, but how long will the backups be retained? 30 days? 60 days? Some hosting providers archive longer than that. Also, if the worst does happen and you need your data restored from a backup, what is the procedure? Backups aren’t much use if you have to struggle to get them re-deployed to your system.

6. Which Applications Do You Support?

Of course, you rely on your accounting solution. It’s how you service your customers or how you keep a pulse on the financials for your business. However, in the last several years, the proliferation of accounting-related applications that users have the option of integrating with their accounting solution has brought with it a huge opportunity for small businesses to leverage a curated ecosystem.

Whether you need applications to manage expenses, track employee time, pay bills, manage inventory, or manage client relationships – chances are there is an app to help and it can be integrated with your accounting platform. Be sure that a cloud hosting provider makes this possible for you.

7. Are You An Authorized Intuit Hosting Provider?

If you’re using QuickBooks Desktop, be sure any potential cloud hosting partners meet this criteria. This exclusive Intuit endorsement means that a hosting company is uniquely qualified to host and sell Intuit products. It’s a good indicator that a company can give you the support you need.

The Promise of Looking Ahead
With the right eye, and the right line of questioning, it's possible to confidently vet potential hosting providers to help you ensure that you're putting your trust in the right company. After all, the right hosting provider doesn't just give you a place to store your data. They act as strategic partners for your firm or business to ensure that you have the groundwork in place to build a scalable organization. As importantly, the right hosting provider helps you to free up time so that you can move your business beyond any perceived limits. That's something that's worth a coveted spot on your roadmap.