DOING BUSINESS SECURELY & EFFICIENTLY IN THE CLOUD:

PIE IN THE SKY…
OR A PROVEN PRACTICE?

BY BILL WILLIAMS

Doing business in the Cloud: if you are not doing it yet, you have definitely heard of it. According to Forbes, it is estimated that more than 83 percent of businesses will be "in the Cloud" by 2020. To many professionals, it represents a giant step into the future of business – which is heavily driven by technology. To others, it is likely to draw some pushback because they have operated safely and successfully without it.

A small part of the resistance is the opposition to change itself and the desire to stick with the method you are most comfortable and familiar with implementing. The greater part, however, is due to various myths that have created many misconceptions about moving your business to the Cloud.

All of the myths and misconceptions boil down to one central claim: the Cloud is "much less secure." This has caused many funeral directors and cemeterians to see the Cloud as just a trend that will eventually lose its sizzle – when, in fact, it is actually the exact opposite.

The benefits of Cloud technology are well-documented: more speed and efficiency, less environmental impact and – maybe most importantly – increased accessibility. Even if

you have an emergency and need access to business or client data in the middle of the night, the Cloud will almost always make your data available to you at the click of a button. Most cloud service providers guarantee 99.9 percent "uptime."

Despite these advantages, security has held many businesses back from switching to the Cloud, as Forbes also reported that more than two-thirds of IT professionals say security is their most significant concern with the Cloud. Read on to learn why fear of the Cloud is more myth than reality and use of the Cloud can ultimately catapult your business into future success.

Many funeral directors and cemeterians use minimal, if any, data security systems. In the past, the primary value for those that utilized a data security system was the ability to prevent access to on-site computers, which was somewhat effective in blocking hackers. But the truth is, these legacy security systems originated before modern-day computer crimes became prevalent. Today's internet hackers have outgrown these systems and are equipped to expose them at any given moment.

In most cases, a locked door has served as the main defense

for the IT equipment and critical business or personal files that these legacy systems protect. Transitioning to the Cloud, your data is safeguarded in off-site data centers that have multi-layered security defenses. Beyond the highest levels of digital encryption, these centers have barbed wire, high fences, cameras and even guards patrolling the area. While the possibility of a breach can never truly be eliminated, you can rest assured knowing your sensitive data is protected by the most advanced measures that exist today.

These data centers may have you wondering, "With my data being stored off-site, I have lost control of it because it is in someone else's hands. Does that actually make it more secure?" Let's clear up one misconception: you still have full access and control over your data, and now, you enjoy an added resource that specializes in keeping the data safe. The security responsibility is shifted to these high-tech data centers and taken away from your office's physical infrastructure, which wasn't designed to protect against today's threats. This lack of tangible access at your office makes it more difficult for third parties to stumble across your data and use it negatively.

As you likely agree, any practice should not be considered safe unless its functions are regularly tested. All verified cloud service providers frequently undergo audits, often annually, as does my company, FSI, to ensure no flaws exist within its security systems. Unless you are conducting an audit yourself, most legacy systems do not have this requirement and leave you vulnerable to prized data slipping through the cracks.

As businesses continue to move permanently to the Cloud and as a result see stronger protection, efficiency and results, security concerns will naturally diminish. But understandably, with change often comes concern. Before making any significant business decisions, always consult the professionals who fully understand the technology you are considering adopting. In almost every case, the Cloud will benefit your business, but there is nothing wrong with thorough due diligence.

While many trends come and go and leave little impact, we're here to tell you the Cloud is not a "pie in the sky" idea, it will take you and your business to the next level of growth, efficiency and success. **FBA**

Bill Williams is president and CEO of Funeral Services Inc. and serves on the FSI Board of Directors as vice chairman. He joined FSI in 2001 as vice president. He was named president in 2003. Under his leadership, FSI has expanded to offer services in more than two dozen states across the country. Williams has experience in every aspect of the funeral service profession, including ownership and management of funeral homes and cemeteries. He began his career in the deathcare industry when he became a licensed funeral director in 1980. He is a graduate of Gupton–Jones College of Mortuary Science in Atlanta, Georgia. To connect with Bill, call 800–749–1340 or email him at bill.williams@fsitrust.com.