

Report on ITA Fall 2011 Conference, Austin, Texas

The core of Information Technology Alliance (ITA) is the CIOs and CTOs of the 30 largest CPA firms after the Big Four. Commercial Logic has been a vendor member of this organization for many years. At the recent ITA fall conference in Austin the focus was all about moving computing resources to the cloud (aka Internet) and software as a service (SaaS). While SaaS has been around for some time now, what is new is that even the largest firms are starting to consider it and try it out in new ways.

This is a big sea change, perhaps even larger than the shift from mini-computers to micro-computers in the 1980s or the shift from DOS to Windows in the 90s, and IT people are just beginning to grapple with it.

The micro-computer revolution was based on the idea that each computer was a *personal computer* and that most of what each of us needed was right there on our own PC. The cloud revolution turns this around and stores all of our resources on the Internet, leaving our personal computers in the role of intelligent terminals. In some ways this is a return to the world of mainframe timesharing that preceded the micro-computer revolution, but what a difference: connectivity, storage, computing power, and the availability of applications have improved by several orders of magnitude. Does anyone remember the old telephone company modems with baud rates of 110 bits per second?

Another aspect of cloud computing is buying (or more accurately renting) capacity for your own servers from Amazon or Rackspace or others. Amazon's pricing for server time is as low as 8 cents an hour for the time you are logged in and actually using it.

Of course there are questions about control and security and what happens to your data if you want to switch tax preparation services or your cloud vendor goes out of business. There are real issues here, but these are capable of resolution through negotiation with the company offering cloud services.

So what are Commercial Logic and APS doing about cloud computing? Here at Commercial Logic we are considering moving some of our virtual (VMWare) servers to the cloud. It makes a lot of sense for test beds and demo sites for starters. If our experience is good we may move more.

APS has just opened its private cloud datacenter in Sydney and already has clients up and running. While the APS Advance software is not browser-based, it has been optimized for Citrix/Terminal Server use for a long time and it is on this basis that it is currently accessed in the cloud.

But this is an example of what one of my friends calls "SOSaaS" or Same Old Software as a Service. APS recognizes this and a major project is underway to rewrite Advance to take advantage of the capabilities of the Internet.