An Epicor® White Paper

The Top 10 Reasons Epicor Clients Choose the Cloud

EPICOR

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Reason #1 2
Freedom of Choice

Reason #2 2
Compelling Cloud Economics

Reason #3 4
Better IT Resource Utilization

Reason #4 5
The Cloud is More Secure

Reason #5 6
Upgrades

Reason #6 7
Mobile and Collaborative

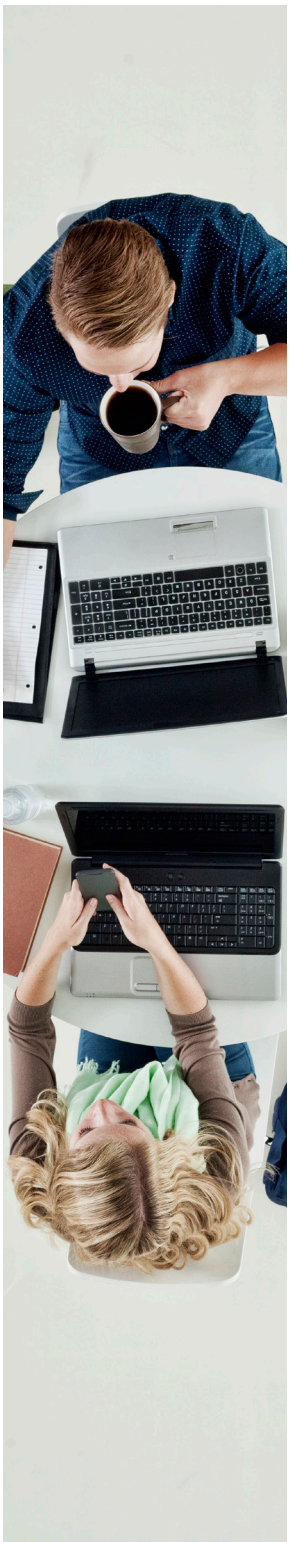
Reason #7 8
Business Consistency and Global Process Alignment

Reason #8 9
Reduced Risk, Greater Visibility, Better Value

Reason #9 9
Faster Time to Value

Reason #10 10
Social Responsibility

Conclusion 11



Introduction

You are moving your ERP to the cloud. At this point, it's no longer an *if* question—it's just a matter of *when*.

This statement shouldn't startle you. The reality is that most enterprise applications are well on their way to being cloud based. We've seen it with simple workloads such as HR and payroll, travel and expense management, and in the last decade we've seen the cloud as the new normal for customer relationship management (CRM) deployments.

This track record of success for cloud-based enterprise applications has brought us to the cross-over point in deployment mix. The cloud has rapidly established itself as the preferred and default deployment environment for companies of all sizes. Today, clients (and ERP vendors) presume that their next enterprise resource planning system (ERP) deployment is more likely to be cloud based than legacy (i.e., on-premises.)

Clients who have already made the leap to the cloud (with their ERP or another enterprise workload), already know the answers to the "why cloud?" question are overwhelmingly compelling and undeniable. But for others who haven't yet benefited from the cloud, questions remain—along with some occasional reluctance to embrace this change. After all, they ask, if the legacy model of ERP deployment (where end customers buy the software and the hardware upfront, then pay services staff to integrate it all, then pay even more to maintain and upgrade it) was good enough for the last three decades, what's changed in the last 10 years?

This document explores the top 10 reasons Epicor clients choose the cloud for their ERP deployment, based on our years of helping Epicor clients leverage the cloud to create both business and technical benefit.

It is important to understand that this conversation is not just about technology, nor is it just about economics (though the technical and economic cases are both compelling.) Upgrading to the cloud means retiring your old approach to business management applications and no longer having to procure, install, maintain, and manage IT systems. And perhaps most compelling is the opportunity to redefine your business processes to leverage the cloud.

It's not just us. Nucleus Research found in a 2015 survey of more than 100 companies that "customers were able to achieve substantial benefits, including reduced IT costs, increased employee productivity, and better inventory management" with a cloud-based ERP deployment.[1]

Cloud deployment has become the new norm. Let's explore some of the reasons why.

1 Nucleus Research, The ROI of Cloud ERP, http://nucleausresearch.com/research/single/the-roi-of-cloud-erp-for-smbs/

"[...]Being locked into a specific deployment and usage format can severely limit the ability to manage the business, and therefore the firm's competitive abilities."

Saugatuck Technology

Reason #1

Freedom of Choice

Put quite simply, not all cloud ERP systems are created equal. Specifically, very few ERP vendors respect your right to choose the deployment model that is most appropriate for you, and revise that decision down the road as your business or technical needs change. By providing our clients the choice of Multi-Tenant (with its compelling economics and seamless upgrades) or Single Tenant (allowing more administrative control and administrative ownership), Epicor clients can choose the model that works best for them today.

As their business or technical needs change, Epicor clients may change their deployment model (from Single to Multi-Tenant, or the other way around), or they may opt to reconsider on-premises deployment and bring their cloud system in house. Even the community of Epicor users who opt to deploy Epicor ERP on premises today benefit from the confidence that comes with knowing that the technical and business processes are in place to facilitate their upgrade to the cloud on the timeline that is right for their business.

Regardless of how you choose to deploy Epicor ERP, your right to transition between on-premises, Multi-Tenant, and Single Tenant is an important one. It recognizes that the "best" deployment model for you today might not be the best model in a few years, or even a few months. The advanced Epicor ICE architecture is designed to facilitate this transformation, and provides peace of mind that as your business needs change, so can your ERP system.

Don't settle for an offering from a vendor that is going to lock you into their only deployment model. Recognize the importance of this freedom[2], and learn more about compelling technical and business migration provisions provided by Epicor.

Reason#2

Compelling Cloud Economics

Early value propositions for cloud deployment tended to focus on economic and financial justification—for good reason. Despite the cloud having subsequently proven its value beyond just good financial sense, there is no doubt that for companies of all sizes the economics of cloud deployment are undeniably compelling, with Epicor Cloud ERP deployments often running 25–40%[3] less than their on-premises deployment parallel.

In deconstructing the total cost of ownership (TCO) of cloud deployments, Epicor often works with clients to help them look beyond the obvious cost savings of cloud deployment, offering a comprehensive TCO comparative workshop that explores the true cost of on-premises and cloud deployments.

Some of the hidden economic benefits of the cloud include:

- **Not being as capital intensive as an on-premises deployment** (because of the subscription-based pricing model). Many capital-constrained companies pursue the cloud because it doesn't place the same demands on their cash flow as the major up-front capital investment typical of legacy deployments.

2 Suggested Reading: Saugatuck Technology report on "The Business Value of Software Deployed Choice, Cloud, On-Premises and More." © 2014 Saugatuck.

3 Epicor Cloud TCO Workshops estimate 25–40% savings over five years. Of course, any expected savings will vary from customer to customer and will also depend on adopting best business practices.

- **Better and more instant scalability**, allowing clients to add (and sometimes remove) users to their system on demand and saving them from having to invest in hardware and software at the "high water mark." This is a significant benefit once your system has gone live—allowing you to grow your system without the need to scale corresponding hardware and infrastructure investments. Leveraged thoughtfully, most clients have also used this scalability to ensure they are subscribing to the right number of users for each stage of your deployment, and occasionally to support seasonal business fluctuations.

- **Upgrade deployment and other administrative activities are included** in your Multi-Tenant subscription. As an on-premises deployed customer with annual maintenance coverage, you're entitled to upgrades as they are released. However, there is a big difference between software "entitlement" and "deployments." Most clients find the cloud auto-upgrade model preferable to managing their own upgrades or hiring expensive professional services staff to manage every upgrade implementation. This is why many on-premises ERP clients—despite their upgrade entitlement—aren't running the most recent version of the ERP system: the cost to implement every upgrade under an on-premises deployment is simply too much for the perceived benefit.

- **The direct and indirect costs of your infrastructure**, from server to database systems to the actual hardware and replacement cycle cost. Enterprise class servers and their backup systems that power modern ERP systems require a five- or six-figure investment, and generally have a three-year duty cycle before they need to be replaced with equally expensive systems. You can "future-proof" your server infrastructure investment best by eliminating the need for it entirely by deploying your ERP in the cloud.

- **The hidden costs of running the servers yourself.** When you consider electricity, cooling systems, backup systems, and remote access technologies, the true costs of running an ERP system yourself aren't always obvious. At the end of the day, you know those bills are being paid from someone's budget, even if they don't have a clear line tying them back to your on-premises ERP system expense.

- **The benefit of the reduced deployment times** (and corresponding improved ROI) that are typical for cloud deployments, as all the necessary infrastructure is in place already. Generally, Epicor is ready to start your implementation within 72 hours of your decision to begin, as we aren't "standing around" waiting for hardware dependencies to be addressed and systems to be optimized for pre-deployment work.

Epicor recognizes that your ERP system doesn't exist as an island, and we provide clients the technologies they need to integrate with their other enterprise systems, including Epicor Service Connect, web services interfaces, large volume data management tools, and real-time application program interfaces (APIs).

Reason #3

Better IT Resource Utilization

Moving to the cloud does not mean that your IT department will go away. It does, however mean that your IT department will be able to deliver higher-value activities that are better aligned with your mission, and they will be able to spend less time "patching the servers and keeping the lights blinking."

It's possible that you are fortunate to have attracted world-class IT talent into your organization. But at the end of the day, most IT departments are stretched pretty thin, and find themselves spending too much time on low-value (but admittedly critical) activities such as verifying backups, applying security updates, and upgrading the infrastructure upon which your critical systems run. There is tremendous business benefit to assigning those tasks back to your ERP vendor (who is likely in the best possible position to do the work) as part of a cloud deployment, which will free up your IT department's time to work on more strategic ERP projects such as creating executive dashboards, deploying mobile devices, and crafting helpful management reports.

It's this aggregation of systems that allows Epicor to provide an environment that is designed to be more secure, more regulatory compliant, and better able to offer business contingency than you could likely build yourself. Epicor maintains massively scalable and redundant systems across our deployments, and even redundant data centers—allowing us to quickly restore service in the improbable event that an entire data center loses all Internet connectivity or power. The breadth and depth of our redundancies, combined with 24x7x365 systems monitoring allow us to offer a financially based service level agreement (SLA) that would be unimaginable for most internal IT departments.

Even the most talented IT department with all the right skills to support a modern ERP solution (e.g., database engineers, network experts, user interface specialists, report designers, and more), will never achieve the level of scale or expertise that Epicor has across all our cloud clients to their single deployment. Because we see application, database, and network performance metrics in real time across thousands of our cloud users, we're able to identify trends and remedy concerns long before they impact users.

Further, our ability to scale operations across every client means that we can bring world-class database engineers, security professionals, and operations staff to the cloud environment—roles that would typically be impossible to justify in support of a single ERP instance within your own organization.

Reason #4

The Cloud is More Secure

A decade ago it might have seemed questionable that a cloud vendor would cite software-as-a-service (SaaS) deployment as a security advantage. At that time, many clients operated under the mindset that "on our network, behind our firewall, and in our control…" constituted a secure ERP deployment.

Thankfully, our thinking has evolved along with our understanding of electronic security. Today, it's hard to imagine a client who could possibly create a more secure operating environment than leading cloud providers such as Epicor. Indeed, industry analyst firm Gartner reports that "Multi-tenant clouds are not only highly resistant to attack, but are also a more secure starting point than most traditional in-house implementations." A 2015 Verizon data breach investigation report echoes similar findings, reporting, "ironically, avoidance of cloud services may even lead to unnecessary security risk, as organizations may continue to rely on poorly managed in-house systems that often have more security vulnerabilities than their public cloud equivalent."[4]

Where security once implied a locking the server room door and forcing people to use long passwords, today it means hardened electronic operating environments. You can't claim to be secure unless you have systems and people protecting your infrastructure 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and verifying that security updates from all vendors are thoughtfully tested, then applied.

Modern security and reliability means massively redundant systems, intrusion detections systems (IDS), automated backup and replication, heavily encrypted traffic for data in transit, a long list of security credentials such as SSAE, PCI, ITAR, and more. And it means hiring independent security testing experts to verify that what you think is secure really *is* secure. If you aren't hiring experts to conduct thoughtful penetration testing, can you really say you're secure? Are you willing to bet your business' most valuable data on it?

Modern electronic security awareness requires us to acknowledge that time and time again VPNs have been proven insecure, careless employees open emails carrying Trojan horse malware, firewall ports are misconfigured, IT staff fall behind on installing critical security patches, and passwords are, well, sometimes set to "password." There is a good chance that the worst of the bad guys are better than the best of your good guys, putting you at a disadvantage in keeping your systems secure—especially if you don't have a full-time information security department perpetually monitoring your systems for unusual activities, as you can expect your cloud application provider to do.

But security doesn't just mean electronic peace of mind and carefully managing user credentials and permissions. Security today is a comprehensive, end-to-end mindset that has to be built across every layer of the ERP environment from the physical network interface cards to the user passwords. It means a holistic approach to anticipating and minimizing possible natural, human, and technical disruptions to your system to ensure uptime and peace of mind.

That lock on your server room door? That's a great way to discourage the cleaning staff from carelessly wandering into the server room with a bucket of soapy water or ensuring nobody "borrows" the big 27-inch monitor you store in there. It is *not* an ERP security measure.

4 Gartner, 22 September 2015, "Clouds Are Secure: Are You Using Them Securely?" ID: G00281279

Reason #5

Upgrades

It's an open secret in the ERP industry that upgrades are generally viewed as a mixed blessing by many clients. Users with an active maintenance plan are entitled to upgrades as they are published, but few clients are enthusiastic about the administrative burden of managing these frequent upgrades. For most companies, the costs of outsourcing this work to professional services experts is impractical, leading to a situation where clients languish on old versions of their ERP system despite the new versions sitting on the shelf.

Cloud deployment redefines the experience by designing upgrades—big and small—to be deployed by the ERP cloud operations staff as part of our standard support services, without imposing update installations on your staff. Minor updates are transparently deployed (generally bi-weekly) in a non-disruptive fashion, and major upgrades are announced well in advance, and include a sandbox training environment and end-user training.

These major upgrades are designed to require little to no project management on your part, short of double checking that everything is working the way you expect it to (e.g., custom reports and any screen modifications) and ensuring that your internal users are prepared to take advantage of the new version.

Always being on the most current version of the software provides peace of mind that you're no longer having to make the "upgrade or not?" decision, and provides you with the newest and most powerful version of Epicor ERP at all times.

Deploying in the cloud means that you never need to think about another upgrade. We take care of the heavy lifting for you.

	Anticipated Benefits	Benefits Actually Realized	% More Than Anticipated
Lower total cost of ownership	41%	51%	24%
Reduced cost and effort of upgrades	39%	44%	13%
Lower start-up costs	37%	40%	8%
Elimination of hardware and associated maintenance	35%	35%	9%
Ease of remote access for distributed workforce	33%	35%	6%
More innovation through more frequent updates	29%	37%	28%
Ability to treat as OpEx versus CapEx	27%	43%	59%
Ease of bringing up new remote sites	26%	26%	0%
We have substantially lowered our risk	25%	28%	12%
Speedier business innovation	13%	17%	31%
Improved IT security	9%	33%	267%
More viable business continuity plan (e.g., natural disaster)	9%	30%	233%

Source: Mint Jutras 2015 Enterprise Solution Study

Reason #6

Mobile and Collaborative

A dozen years ago you could presume that everyone who needed access to your ERP system would have a desk, a PC, and 15-inch monitor. That no longer reflects the realities of today's ERP user landscape.

The modern ERP deployment landscape is full of mobile professionals, including sales and service staff operating outside the four walls of your office, who expect access to the ERP system from their handheld devices. You also have mobile onsite staff such as shop floor operators and logistics staff that need to access your ERP from tablets and similar devices. Moving to a cloud-based system gives everyone the real-time system access they require as a routine part of their jobs while driving out the inefficiency of paper-based processes and the burden and security risk of figuring out how to deliver this yourself.

Opening up your ERP system by virtue of cloud deployment allows you to retire the poorly defined ad-hoc "integration by Excel file" workflows that have cropped up across your organization, where email is the backbone for critical business collaboration between people and systems. In their place, you can deploy real-time integration processes that link your employees, vendors, partners, and customers. From contract designers, to out-sourced manufacturers, to third-party logistics providers, to your own end customers who require real-time access to critical business data, deploying in the cloud makes it easier and more secure to collaborate and integrate across companies in real time—something that is just too difficult with legacy deployment models. Moving to the cloud brings instant (and likely long overdue) improvement to your supply chain and manufacturing processes.

Cloud deployment brings the opportunity to redefine many of your legacy business processes and workflows in a way that leverages these more open, connected, instantaneous integration paths. For example, employing inexpensive handheld technologies across the company can drive improved efficiency, enhanced insights, and increased accuracy to your decision-making processes.

Reason #7

Business Consistency and Global Process Alignment

Increasingly, companies have staff working across multiple locations and they aspire to provide the efficiency of a single unified ERP system across the enterprise to support them. For many organizations, moving to the cloud provides the immediate opportunity to shed multiple operating ERP systems across the company, achieve instant visibility across every location, and standardize a single set of operational and administrative processes.

Running different systems and processes in each corporate location complicates the end customer experience, denies financial staff the transparency they require, prevents operational staff from peering across inventory availability, and denies production staff the often-needed ability to answer "what if" questions.

Deploying a single cloud ERP globally (where the only infrastructure requirement is Internet access) removes many operational obstacles in your organization, facilitates better global regulatory compliance, and gives you the confidence that your continued expansion efforts can be accommodated without a significant IT effort by simply enabling that new location in your existing cloud-based ERP system. With an Epicor Cloud ERP deployment, there is no need for complicated IT infrastructure investments. The global presence of Epicor coupled with highly localized functionality means that we have the systems you need to support an additional warehouse across town, another sales team in a different state, or a new production facility in another country.

With consistency comes improved transparency and increased efficiency. A recent study by industry research firm Aberdeen reported[5] that cloud ERP users close their month 3% faster, have reduced days with sales outstanding, shorten hours from order taking to shipping by 18%, have a 3% better schedule compliance, and a 2% improvement in both inventory accuracy and financial report accuracy. Clearly the cloud delivers an environment from which best-run companies operate.

Metric	SaaS ERP	On-premise
Days to close a month	5.31	5.45
Days sales outstanding	40.75	41.04
Hours from order taking to shipment	91.39	111.84
Complete and on-time delivery	94%	91%
Increase in operating margins over the past 2 years	13%	10%
Employees that exceed performance metrics	46%	30%
Decrease in time to decision over the past year	27%	18%
Internal schedule compliance	92%	89%
Inventory accuracy	95%	93%
Percentage of accurate financial reports	95%	93%

Source: Aberdeen Group, October 2014

5 Aberdeen Group, October 2014 Research Report into Cloud Efficiency

"Organizations with SaaS ERP spent exactly 100% of their ERP implementation budget on implementation, compared to organizations with on-premise ERP that went 12% over budget."

SaaS and Cloud ERP Observations: Is Cloud ERP Right for You?
Aberdeen Group
December 2012

Reason #8

Reduced Risk, Greater Visibility, Better Value

Many clients choose a cloud-based system (ERP and other workloads) because it allows them to deploy a much more complete solution than they could otherwise manage or financially justify under legacy deployment models. Not having to make a massive upfront investment in the ERP system and its supporting infrastructure is critical in allowing smaller companies to perform beyond same-sized competitors from an enterprise application quality and completeness perspective.

Beyond the financial and operational efficiencies, clients deploying Epicor ERP will often cite the ability to instantly scale their system (e.g., more users, new capabilities) as their business grows as a compelling justification. This, combined with the massive scale at which Epicor Cloud ERP operates, provides a level of economic efficiency well beyond what's possible in any stand-alone, on-premises deployment.

Beyond the day-to-day benefit is the confidence that Epicor is providing a financially backed 99.5% service level agreement[6], and a business continuity model that significantly reduces the business and operational risks that every company is justifiably sensitive to.

Reason #9

Faster Time to Value

Deploying in the cloud brings with it shortened deployment times, as the systems upon which our clients deploy are already in place and optimized for the immediate deployment of the "next client."

Not only does this save time and expense by eliminating the otherwise necessary but wasteful provisioning of supporting infrastructure and all the necessary testing across each client, it also allows you to benefit from the best business practices and patterns already established to support other cloud clients.

Beyond this resource savings is the obvious (but difficult to quantify) benefit of going live sooner. Because your decision to deploy a new ERP is presumably motivated by your awareness of the economic benefits of a ERP new system, bringing those benefits to your firm a month—or a quarter—sooner will drive that much more value that much sooner, and improve your corresponding return on investment (ROI).

6 Our actual system availability metrics are much higher, and well beyond what most internal IT departments would be comfortable committing to. Ask for details. Exceptions, conditions, and limitations apply.

Reason #10

Social Responsibility

It's irresponsible to ignore the social and environmental impact of our business decisions. Deploying a new ERP system is no exception to this corporate social responsibility.

Imagine the resources that go into on-premises deployment. Multiple new computers have to be manufactured, with their well-documented environmental impact[7]. Those computers need to be transported from their place of production to a wholesaler, who needs to warehouse them until they are later transported to you, likely crossing tens of thousands of miles in the process. Electricity is generated to power them, and ultimately those physical machines are scrapped (along with their toxic components[8]). The impact of that waste can't be ignored if your company is looking to make decisions that balance your corporate needs and social responsibilities. Some argue the only "green" computer is the one that was never produced.

That's why cloud deployment is now widely cited as one of the most environmentally responsible IT decisions. A study[9] by WSP Environment Research pointed out that many multi-tenant deployments present "a carbon footprint per transaction that is 95% less than on-premises deployment." Other experts agree. Jonathan G. Koomey, Ph.D. (Stanford University) reports "the cloud's diversity of users and economies of scale make it tough to beat from either an environmental or cost perspective."

It's the scale of Epicor Cloud ERP that delivers this environmental efficiency. Each of our systems are able to support thousands of concurrent users, and we have the ability to bring on additional users near a marginal carbon footprint of zero because of this scale—something that simply can't be replicated outside of a multi-tenant cloud deployment.

Perhaps reducing your carbon footprint isn't your primary decision making criterion, but it's certainly a benefit that aligns with the values of many of your employees, customers, and communities.

7 http://www.nrdc.org/living/stuff/your-computers-lifetime-journey.asp
8 http://ewasteguide.info/hazardous-substances
9 http://www.wspgroup.com/en/Who-we-are/In-the-media/News/2011/Study-for-salesforcecom-reveals-huge-carbon-emissions-savings-from-cloud-computing/

Conclusion

Moving to the cloud presents a number of easily quantifiable benefits, and many that can be difficult to assign a value to, despite their obvious business and/or technical appeal.

Arguably, the one cost that is especially difficult to derive, but outweighs all others is the high cost of doing nothing—something we haven't discussed in this paper as it's a consideration unique to your operating environment, priorities, and objectives. How much does it cost you in efficiency, effectiveness, and lost opportunity to continue to build your future enterprise application strategy on a decades-old deployment model that has been proven to steal value from your organization? Only you can answer that question.

Remember that your migration to the cloud doesn't necessarily have to be an all-at-once strategy. We suggest prioritizing cloud deployment of enterprise workloads that provide the greatest amount of value when transitioned to the cloud (generally those that derived value through improved collaboration). Once you do that and establish a 12-, 24-, and 36-month roadmap to the cloud for your remaining enterprise workloads, you'll quickly discover for yourself the benefits of becoming a cloud-centric organization.

About Epicor

Epicor Software Corporation drives business growth. We provide flexible, industry-specific software that is designed around the needs of our manufacturing, distribution, retail, and service industry customers. More than 40 years of experience with our customers' unique business processes and operational requirements is built into every solution—in the cloud, hosted, or on premises. With a deep understanding of your industry, Epicor solutions spur growth while managing complexity. The result is powerful solutions that free your resources so you can grow your business. For more information, connect with Epicor or visit www.epicor.com.

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