



Questions to ask  
about a cloud  
service



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Communications**

# How should this guide be used?

This guide provides a list of questions you may wish to consider about a cloud service you are considering or already using. Not all the questions will be of relevance or interest to you. As a consumer you may wish to identify and explore the questions of most relevance to assist you in evaluating a cloud service.

- Many of these questions you can already answer for yourself by researching a cloud service online and reading the terms and conditions.
- There are some questions you may wish to discuss with the cloud provider.

Overall, these questions are intended to help you better understand and evaluate whether a cloud service meets your needs and help you compare between different services



## ► Ownership of and access to your data

Data ownership is an important consideration. Creating, uploading, or accessing information in a cloud does not necessarily equate with legal ownership. It is important that you understand data ownership and access arrangements before entering into an agreement. It may also be important for you to understand how to obtain a copy of your data from a cloud service provider once the agreement ends.

- Q: Does the cloud provider claim any ownership of data it stores?
- Q: How can I get a copy of my data at the end of an agreement? How long do I have to get a copy of this data? In what format will the data be provided?
- Q: Is all of my data deleted once our agreement ends? Are there any circumstances where I would be denied access to my data?

## ► Location of data storage and backup

Cloud service providers may store data on a number of servers, locally or offshore.

Understanding broadly where data is located can help you assess the risks and benefits.

Knowing if and how often data is backed up can help you understand how this compares to alternative back-up options.

- Q: Where (Country/State) is my data being stored?
- Q: Is my data being backed up? If yes, where and how often?

# Privacy and data breaches

Some cloud services store your data in multiple countries. It is important to understand whether your data is shared with third parties, and what happens if your data is breached. If you are storing your customer's details in a cloud-based service, it will also be important for you to have assurance that you are meeting any obligations you have under the Privacy Act 1988. For more information on privacy and cloud computing please see the [small business factsheet on Privacy Considerations in the Cloud](#).

- [Q: Does the cloud provider comply with Australian privacy laws?](#)
- [Q: Under what circumstances would the cloud provider access my data or disclose information to a third party?](#)
- [Q: Will I be notified if my data has been lost, breached or its security compromised? What arrangements are in place to secure my data? Will I be compensated if my data is compromised?](#)



## Staying flexible—and being able to change providers

The ability to move data and switch providers is an important consideration for consumers of cloud services. Cloud service providers may use different technologies to create, store and process information. You should seek to understand what options are available to transfer your data to a new provider, or recover your data in a usable format.

- Q: What options are available to transfer my data? In what format can I get a copy of my data at the end of our agreement?
- Q: What tools are available for copying or transferring my data? Will I be charged if I withdraw my data?

## Service level and complaint handling

Cloud service providers and their products may vary in the support they provide and the service level they offer. Understanding your cloud service provider's service level and support arrangements can assist you in matching a service to meet your business needs.

- Q: Will I be notified about service outages? If yes, how will I be notified?
- Q: What service-level agreement does the cloud provider offer? Will I or my customers be compensated for periods of service downtime?
- Q: How can I contact the cloud provider if an issue arises? What are their customer support hours?



## Fees and charges

As with all communication and utility services it is important to understand what fees and charges apply in order to avoid bill shock. In particular, it may be useful to ask about any potential excess or hidden fees and the triggers for those fees.

- Q: Are there any additional fees or excess charges? What are they and when are they triggered?
- Q: In what circumstances can would a cloud provider change the terms and conditions of their service? Will I be notified about the change before it comes into effect?

## Further information

Cloud service providers, just like any other business, are covered by Australian consumer protection and privacy legislation. For further information about your rights and responsibilities as a cloud consumer please see [Legal Tips for Small Business using Cloud Services](#).





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