

Cloud computing, which is the use of a remote vendor connected by the internet for computing needs, isn't a futuristic concept. It is here today. In most cases, you use the browser on your local computer to interact with the remote program. A wide variety of programs fit the definition of cloud computing. Email may such as G-Mail, Hotmail, Yahoo Mail are used over the Internet in the cloud. Word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation programs may now reside in the cloud through Google Apps, Microsoft Windows Live, Office 365, ThinkFree and Zoho. Many vendors now offer cloud storage, system backup to the cloud, simple calendaring and contact management online. All these can be done through the cloud.

But can we trust the cloud? It seems there have been a lot of data breaches lately. We read about them in the headlines every couple of days. Here are just a few that have made the headlines in the last few months.

- **Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center patient data compromised.**
- **University of North Florida gets breached again, data on 23K students at risk.**
- **Hackers raid University of Nebraska database with 654k Social Security numbers.**
- **Hackers steal 200,000 card numbers from wholesaler Restaurant Depot.**
- **LinkedIn Confirms Account Passwords Hacked.**
- **eHarmony is hacked; 1.5 million passwords stolen.**

There are some big names on that list. If they can't seem to keep our data safe how are we supposed to learn to trust the cloud and begin using and integrating it into our lives? I for one am not yet comfortable with entrusting too much of my data to the cloud.

But how can we use the cloud and stay safe? I think we can use the cloud in small doses today and maintain a good degree of safety. All we have to do is follow a few rules or guidelines of cloud computing.

1st: Have good strong passwords. Use a mixture of letters, numbers, and symbols. A good example of a strong pass word is **xdRt32\$#ft&893FF**. I'd like to see that one cracked soon. Also don't use the same password at every site you got to. Each site should have a unique password. If you can't keep track of them use a password management program like **KeePass**. It is free and works great.

2nd: Only give out data you don't mind losing. If I sign up at FreeDessert.Com there is no reason they need to store my credit card number or social security number. So if they require it I don't sign up there.

3rd: Use a prepaid Visa or MasterCard for online purchases. You can load it up for online shopping and when you are done with it get rid of it. If the site gets breached that you used that card at and the number is exposed there will be nothing to get.

4th: When a site asks me to use a security question and they want to know my mother's maiden name, my youngest son, my first car, or anything like that. I don't give that information. I use a phrase like NOT GIVEN or NO WAY as the answer to those types of questions. I use **KeePass** to keep track of all the answers I give at each site so if I ever do need them I can recall what I did answer. No site needs to keep that type of data in my opinion.

Use common sense online will help you to stay safe. If someone came to your door and asked you for your social security number, credit card numbers, important info like your mother maiden name you would be really leery of giving it to them. And you should be. You would be asking yourself and them; why do

you need this information. Well it's the same online. Actually let me stress I'd be even more leery online to give out that kind of info. It seems that people have an inherent trust online that they don't have offline.

I do believe we can use the cloud safely if we exercise common sense and vigilance. If we use one of the cloud data backup services make sure you send your data compressed and in an encrypted archive file. Use strong passwords and guard the data you do give out.

Remember it is really up to you to guard your data and information. Don't let your guard down and think that every company is going to be looking out for your data.