

# The Cloud for Insights

## A Guide for Small and Midsize Business

As the volume of data grows, businesses are using the power of the cloud to gather, analyze, and visualize data from internal and external sources to improve business performance on a variety of fronts.





Today's cloud-based data and insight solutions can help businesses of any size connect the dots.

# Insights in the Cloud

Business today runs on data: about customers, transactions, markets, and trends, about internal operations, logistics, and supply. Just collecting this data is a formidable challenge but it's not enough. To make it valuable, businesses need to sift through it to spot the trends that matter fast enough to act.

That's a huge challenge for any company, but smaller businesses tend to have more digitally disconnected data or data kept separate just because it is stored only on one computer or mobile device.

## **Connect the dots.**

If your business runs software on one computer for financial management, another package on the network for business-specific tasks like operations and product planning, and a few online tools for customer relationship management, it can be nearly impossible to bring all that data together for a complete, real-time view of your business.

## **Big data, small data, rich data, all data.**

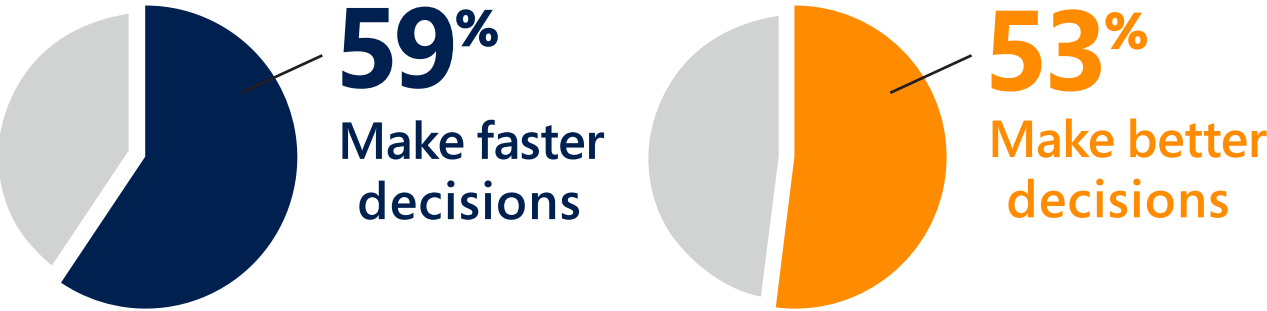
By embracing a cloud-based data solution, you can unite those individual data streams and use that information to answer questions like "How can I target only my best customers?" and "How can I reduce the costs of generating new leads?"

Then add in "big data" from social networks, location systems, search engines, and elsewhere online and suddenly you have the tools to anticipate trends and personalize service—just like the biggest enterprises.

Too expensive? Too complicated? Not anymore: today's cloud-based solutions can help businesses of any size connect the dots.



Top reasons why business decision makers invest in big data analytics:



Source: IDG Enterprise, 2014

# What Cloud Insights Mean for Your Business

Cloud computing is a technological innovation, but how does it connect to the real needs and pains of smaller businesses?

The rules for business keep changing and the data you need to conduct it keeps growing. With the massive scale of cloud computing to help you make sense of it all, your business can:

**Integrate:** Discover the best times to deliver targeted, personalized experiences at every point of contact by combining your customer transaction history with details about their online behaviors. Cloud systems let you deepen your relationships with your customers easily and at lower cost.

**Analyze:** The computing and data storage power of the cloud lets you weather fluctuations in demand while offering always-on analytical tools for you and your employees. Better still, there's no more waiting days or weeks to see the information

you need in order to make informed decisions, and you only pay for capacity when you use it.

**Visualize:** It's hard to act on data that's buried in a complicated report or an application that requires expert technical skills. Look for cloud-based data platforms that present data through familiar, widely used business tools that enable anyone in your organization to spot and act on trends quickly.

**Secure:** Worried about your data? It's safer in the cloud than on a local hard drive that could fail or on a device that could be lost or stolen. Backup, disaster recovery, and high availability are cloud fundamentals: Security updates and patches are updated globally, reducing risk and enabling better data security across all devices, including mobile.

# Data Tools for Smaller Businesses

Many small and midsize businesses already run software to support key business functions. By moving from desktop and locally based apps to the cloud, you can provide your people with consistent, secure access to the data they need in a number of business tasks and roles, including:

**Customer relationship management (CRM).** Cloud-based CRM tools help you better service your customers—and win new ones—with a complete view of their history and what problems or opportunities they might be facing today.

**Financial management.** Gain greater control over your finances and streamline your operations to cut costs and support business growth.

**Data visualization.** You can explore your data in the cloud in many ways. One of the most powerful ways for identifying patterns, outliers, or trends is to view it in a chart, graph, or scorecard. Look for cloud CRM and ERP or accounting solutions with built-in visualization features.

**Social and big data analytics.** The amount of social data available about prospects, customers, and potential hires is growing all the time. When you start using cloud-based tools you can more easily integrate and analyze social data.

**Data storage and IaaS.** Infrastructure as a service allows you to store data in the cloud at an affordable price and to easily add more storage capacity when you need it. Your cloud provider handles data security and storage maintenance.



# Bring Data to Life Through the Cloud

## Cloud Authority

Putting your business data through the cloud gives you one complete view of your business.

## Cloud Innovation

Improve your business performance with data-driven insights into people and processes.

## Cloud Connection

Connect new sources of data to your business systems easily to delight your customers.

## Cloud Scale

Use cloud-based analytics to cut big data down to size regardless of your IT budget.

**Smart Cloud for Smart Business.** The cloud gives any size business better ways to collect, analyze, and visualize data to save money, bring new products to market faster, and drive new customer experiences.

# Cloud Insights by the Numbers

For SMBs that extend data analysis tools to employees:



**39%** use **CLOUD-BASED SYSTEMS** to do so.

**48%** provide BI through a **MOBILITY SOLUTION**.

—Aberdeen, 2013

**Personalization uses data to target each customer individually.**

**94%** of marketers see **PERSONALIZATION** as critical to future success.

**58%** of marketers see **BIG DATA** as key to personalization.

—Econsultancy, 2013



When asked how they are using the cloud to drive business performance:



**78%** of SMBs see value in **BIG DATA** integration services.

**74%** see value in big data **STATISTICAL MODELS**.

—Sadovykh, Poisson, Papin, 2014

# Evolution of Insights in the Cloud: Becoming Data-Driven

What new and emerging capabilities can small businesses unlock on their journey to the cloud?

By connecting more data, your team can keep closer watch on the processes that influence customer experience and business performance. They can spot problems and opportunities more quickly, constantly making changes to improve results. The result of all these quantitative improvements is a qualitative transformation enabling your business to:

**Make processes run more smoothly.** Find new efficiencies as you migrate from manual processes and stand-alone systems to cloud-based services. Then combine that with data from new sources including sensors, product tags, mobile devices, and other components of the emerging Internet of Things, to uncover opportunities for cost savings in everything from logistics to resource consumption.

**Treat every customer like they are your only customer.** When you combine customer information with the external information you already have from social networks and search engines, your business can cost-effectively tailor products, offers, and services more precisely to the interests of each individual customer.

**Target and measure marketing performance.** Use data-based marketing to light up opportunities, raise awareness, convert interest

The result of all these quantitative improvements is a qualitative transformation of your business.

into sales, and build loyalty. Figure out exactly what's working in your marketing budget so you can get the most out of every dollar.

**See around corners with predictive analytics.** You can access the same analytical power that larger companies do with less investment, enabling your team to ask the right questions and spot the right trends. Cloud-based analytical tools can better anticipate market demand, conferring a huge advantage over more reactive competitors.

# Vision for Your Data-Driven Business

*What business processes and outcomes can businesses achieve through the cloud?*

When businesses move data to the cloud and start using cloud-based analytical tools, it opens up new possibilities for bringing new products and services to market quickly, engaging better with customers, managing resources more efficiently, and competing to win with anyone, large or small. Now, you can empower your people to do great things, including:

**Be big on the inside:** The big secret of big data is that it's not really about the data: it's about what people do with it. Global enterprises spend big bucks to create data warehouses where they stockpile data to find business insights, but with data solutions in the cloud, you don't have to. Anyone from startups to traditional businesses can "rent" the power they need from the cloud to answer even the biggest business questions.

**Get insights from everywhere:** Managing your data in the cloud makes it easier to put the right information into the hands of your frontline sales, operations, and service teams, who can use insights from your CRM and ERP systems to deliver a more personalized experience, better engagements, and greater loyalty.

**Conduct informed collaboration:** Data available through the cloud is always up-to-date and always in sync, so everyone is seeing the same real-time picture of the business. When cloud data is made available through standard business analysis tools like Microsoft Excel, more people can gain and contribute insights, leading to better outcomes and faster innovation.

**Ensure seeing is believing:** Encourage your team to explore new datasets using cloud visualization tools. Seeing data in graphs or charts can provide your team with a strategic, real-time view of performance metrics, trends, and business-critical information so they can act quickly.

## SOLUTION IN ACTION

### Gearys delivers 5-star service with Microsoft Dynamics and the Microsoft cloud



Gearys has been the pinnacle of luxury retail for 85 years, serving a diverse clientele from the store's location in Beverly Hills, California. Gearys modernized their business management systems, starting with Microsoft Dynamics ERP and Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online, to better serve existing customers while reducing costs.

"Dynamics keeps track of our inventory, our clients, our orders. We then bring all that information into Microsoft Dynamics CRM," explained Mary Donahue, director of web operations.

**Old fashioned service meets 21st century convenience.** Gearys uses Microsoft Dynamics to keep track of customer information. Sales associates can instantly call up profiles and past history on

mobile devices on the sales floor, delivering a personalized experience for every client.

**Better data for better visibility.** Internally Gearys can forecast purchasing trends to ensure they don't miss any opportunities. "Microsoft Dynamics gives us the ability to better forecast what our clients are buying," said Donahue. "We're not playing catch-up, we're out ahead of it."

**Improved service, reduced cost.** Moving all the inventory and sales data into a single system lets Gearys track and control costs. "I anticipate a 10–15 percent reduction in costs," said CFO Patrick Walters.

**Learn more** about how Gearys gained better customer insights using cloud-based solutions from Microsoft.

## Considerations: To best realize these benefits for your business, ask the following questions

### What data sources does your business rely on today?

Do you still use paper or stand-alone software for accounting? How does your business handle payroll or hiring? Can data give you better ways to connect to customers and close sales? Moving these systems to the cloud makes finding efficiencies easier. Look for a larger, better established cloud partner that is already handling data security, redundancy, and availability issues to help you comply with new business rules.

### Are your cloud partners in it for the long haul?

Continuity matters, and when cloud-based services end unexpectedly (either because the vendor terminates the service, or because a cloud provider ceases operations), the disruption can be costly and painful for your business. Ask your cloud vendor all the nosy questions about the services your business cares most about and judge for yourself if they are a long-term partner.

### Are your employees giving away valuable business information without realizing it?

Some free, cloud-based productivity tools and consumer applications make money by tracking how it gets used or by using it to advertise to anyone who installs one. "Free" services often come with other information security risks, too. Evaluate all the hidden costs as you look at the value of a straightforward license agreement.

### How well do you articulate your own product or service innovation, business development, and sales processes?

Do you have cloud partners who understand your business? To take the best advantage of the promise of cloud capabilities, you want to find a partner who speaks more than "geek." You want to find someone with the breadth and depth of experience to speak your business language.



# Key Takeaways

- Before businesses can use data effectively to drive decisions and improve results, it's important to bring all the data together in one place. Cloud-based solutions can help.
- The scale and economics of the cloud make it possible for any size business to take advantage of big data for customer relationship management, marketing, and predictive analytics.
- Data is most useful to business decision makers if it is easy to access, easy to manipulate, and easy to incorporate into reports, spreadsheets, and presentations.

# Take the Next Steps

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