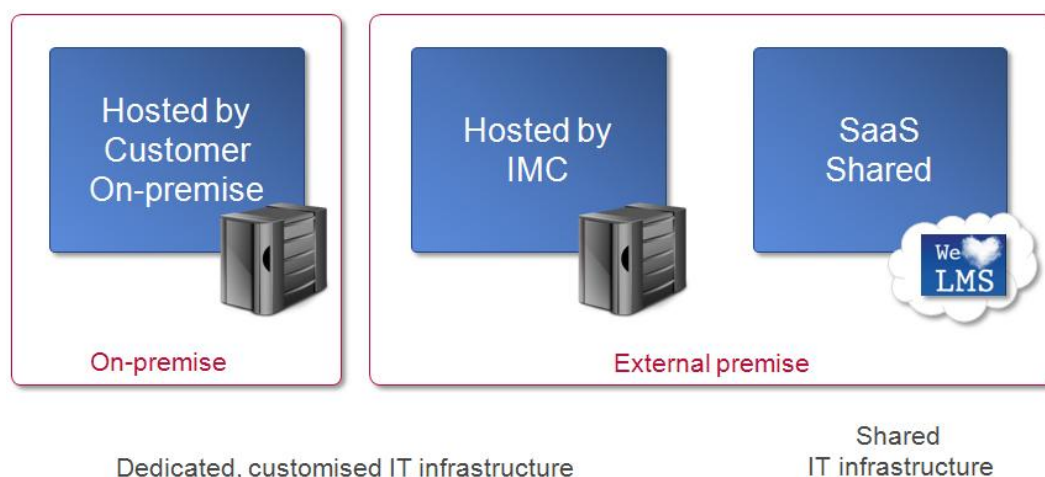


# Welcome to the Cloud with CLIX SaaS

## Learning in the cloud

*Dr Dirk Thissen, managing director at IMC (UK) Learning Ltd, takes a look at the 'Software as a Service' model for learning technologies*

Once the domain of the technical elite, cloud computing has developed into a major business trend, with many businesses and organisations accessing applications over the Internet on a 'Software as a Service' (SaaS) model. In fact, according to a study by Forrester Research, a fifth of companies already use solutions from the cloud and this is set to increase in the future.



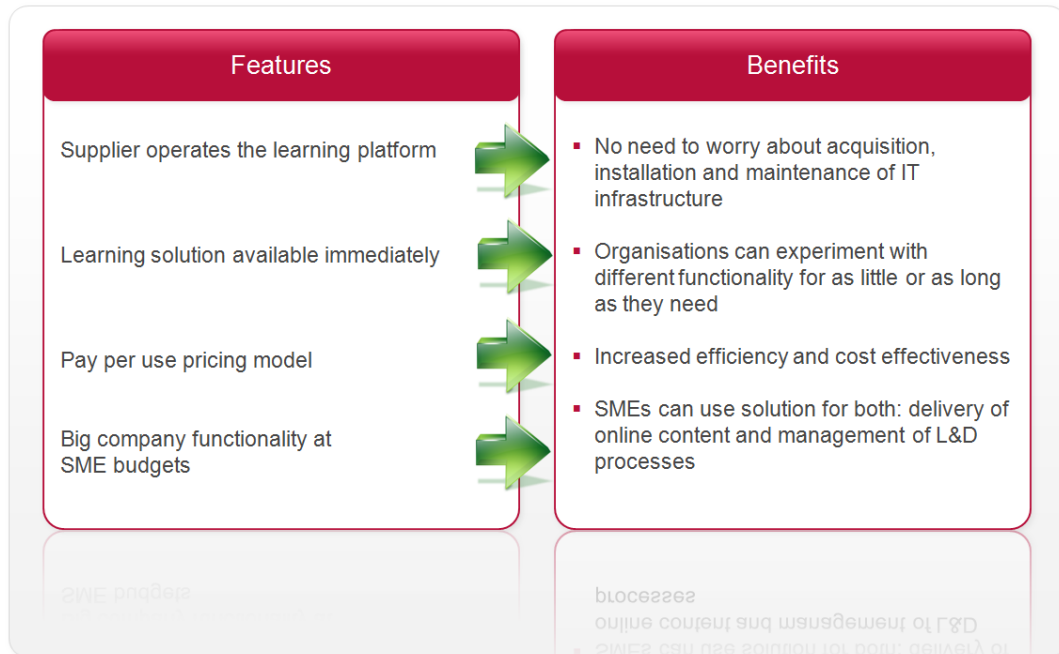
### What is cloud computing and SaaS?

So what exactly is cloud computing and SaaS? In essence, cloud computing means you no longer operate your IT infrastructure yourself, but instead use the Internet in a way that is tailored to your requirements. This means that data storage and software programs, such as learning management systems, are no longer located on your own computers but 'in the cloud' – an IT infrastructure which is available worldwide over the Internet.

Since software in the cloud is based on multi-tenant architecture, the same infrastructure is provided to all users independently of each other. In fact, the only individual system requirements are Internet access and a web browser.

## What are the benefits?

There are many benefits associated with using a SaaS model for training and learning, from simplifying access to reducing costs and enhancing learning management functionality.



Selecting the most appropriate learning management system (LMS) is a daunting task, particularly for small to medium sized businesses (SMEs) or first time users. Much research needs to be undertaken to ensure the functionality of an LMS matches the learning requirements of its users within an organisation. A clear vision needs to be set out and how the LMS fits into the wider business and human resources development strategy has to be realised. Once it is selected, there is a need to show an adequate return on investment in order to justify expenditure – all of which usually weighs heavily on the shoulders of the training manager. This is where the SaaS business model for learning technologies can be useful. The supplier operates the learning platform and you don't have to worry about acquisition, installation or maintenance of the IT infrastructure, leaving your team to concentrate even more on core tasks.

Not only this, but with a SaaS solution, you only pay for the services you actually use and they become immediately available for use. Organisations are able to experiment with different functionality for as little, or as long, as they need to. This is particularly important for SMEs and those looking to introduce online learning into an organisation for the first time, as it eliminates the need to invest large sums of money in hardware and software licences. Effectively, a SaaS solution for training and learning lowers the barriers for entry and allows the most up-to-date technologies to be used by companies of all sizes, with the flexibility to meet their specific business needs.

Using a SaaS solution also allows organisations to gain access to a large amount of management solutions that might not be otherwise available within their budget. LMSs are usually used in one of two scenarios – either for delivery of content through an online library with off-the-shelf content, or for the management of learning and development processes including performance management, learning plans and talent management. The latter is extremely important in order to track employee progress and the success, or otherwise, of the delivery methods implemented. As discussed previously, the lower costs of a SaaS solution, coupled with the flexible, modular contract nature of it, enables all organisations to utilise more functionality for learning management – much of which is usually the preserve of only the biggest players.

### What are the concerns?

Sure, this all sounds great. But many people and organisations have concerns over using SaaS solutions, not least for LMS where information needs to be accessed quickly and might be of a personal or confidential nature. Organisations are right to be concerned about this, but by asking the following questions of your supplier, you can rest assured that you are in safe hands.



**Is my data safe?** – The very nature of cloud computing and SaaS is that information is stored online, which certainly opens up questions about security. It is important that your supplier carries out an incremental backup of your data at least once a day, as well as guaranteeing backup of its networks. In addition to this, assurances should be made that all data will be protected from misuse by unauthorised users.



**Will the system be constantly available?** – We've all heard stories of online solutions that go down for hours on end, so it is important to know you can access the system as and when needed. When speaking to your supplier, ask if there is a system uptime guarantee and take a look at its uptime figures for the past year.



**Does maintenance work affect my operation?** – Even with a SaaS model for learning technologies, maintenance and upgrades are needed. Ask your supplier when maintenance will occur, and for how long, making sure this will not affect your use of the service.



**What support do I receive?** – As with any software, whether hosted internally or in the cloud, there will be time when you will need support. The support terms should be clearly laid out before you begin using the solution. Since every organisation is different, these should be ideally tailored to your specific requirements.

### **What once was a product is now a service**

The Internet has certainly opened up opportunities for training and learning management and the possibilities for development seem endless. Using a SaaS model for learning technologies allows learning professionals to access these easily, quickly and cost effectively, irrespective of technology knowhow. It does however move the goalposts from purchasing a product to a service. The above questions will help to appease some concerns, but ensure that your chosen supplier has the experience and expertise to provide you with the very best learning management system and is able to continue providing you with this service for as long as you require it.



*Dr Dirk Thissen is managing director at IMC (UK) Learning Ltd, one of the world's leading service and technology suppliers of advanced learning and content solutions. For more information about IMC, please visit [www.im-c.co.uk](http://www.im-c.co.uk)*

*First published by Trainingszone – [www.trainingzone.co.uk/](http://www.trainingzone.co.uk/)*