The "Cloud"

In 1997 I bought my first [Palm Pilot](#) handheld device and it was love at first sync. Four buttons on the bottom for calendar, contacts, tasks and notes and I thought it was so cool to sync all my appointments, contacts, tasks and notes between my computer and my Palm. I loved my Palm from that very first sync (the device and the simplistic syncing) and it instantly became a staple of my business. I always had all my client's addresses and phone numbers at my finger tips. My calendar was always at hand to make appointments (I have only goofed up maybe 3 or 4 appointments in 15 years of being self employed). All the tech details I have to remember, but can't, are stored in it. I still use a Palm today (my current Palm is only about 4 years old). Note: Palms are no longer manufactured and in fact [Palm was purchased by HP in 2010](#) and then [abandoned in 2011 along with their PC business](#). Needless to say I am babying my last Palm and it is probably time for me to start looking elsewhere for my syncing needs.

I have worked with many of my client's iPhones, Blackberries and Androids but none can match the simplicity of the Palm sync. Rarely if ever did I have "duplicate" issues. If I changed a contact on both my computer and the Palm at the same time I ended up with a duplicate contact. Easy fix. But I do have to keep a separate contact list on my cell phone. If a phone number changes I have to remember to change it both on my computer and on my phone. It can be tiresome.

Simply put the "Cloud" is the Internet, but more specifically, storing our information (all or some of it: contacts, calendar, tasks, notes, documents, pictures, music and videos) on the Internet. When I started my business in 1996 most people had just one computer at home. All their information was stored on it and at most we would backup that one computer and thus had two copies of their data. Now many people have more than one device that they would like to keep in sync with each other. If you own a desktop computer, a laptop computer, a tablet, a smartphone or an iPod you may want to see some of the same information on all those devices and a website too, just in case!

So now everyone wants in on the syncing business. Some do it well and others not so well). Apple has decided to [discontinue the ill-fated MobileMe service](#) and replace it with [iCloud](#). MobileMe syncing never did live up to Palm's simplicity and caused so much aggravation for so many. So where do we go

from here, or to be a bit more correct, where have we been heading for the last few years? We are now in the process of "demoting" personal computers to "just another device status" ([Steve Jobs to "Demote PC"](#)). In other words, more and more people are using multiple devices like tablets and smartphones and using the computer less and less. So it is making less sense to keep the "master copy" of our data on the PC. The industry is moving in the direction of storing our "master copy" of our data on the Internet and then syncing all our devices (including our computers) to the Internet. Our data will be stored in the "Cloud" and different data will be synced to different devices. For example you might like to have all your appointments or contacts on both your smartphone and your computer but you probably don't need to have all your documents, pictures and music on your smartphone as well as your computer.

All the computer giants like [Apple](#), [Microsoft](#), [HP](#), [Google](#), [Amazon](#), etc. are getting in on the act. Storing our "master data" on the Internet can be a blessing but it is not without pitfalls. Google ([blames software update for lost Gmail data](#)) and T-Mobile ([Sidekick Disaster: Servers Crashed, And They Don't Have A Backup](#)) both had highly publicized data losses that affected thousands of customers. Some people will never be comfortable trusting their data to the Internet. I always say that if a hacker really wants to get at your data, no one, no company, is going to stop them. Precautions will have to be taken as we move to the cloud. Different services will do this differently but the main idea will be to always keep a copy of that really important information in your possession and don't put anything on the Internet that you would not want to fall into the wrong hands.

How do we decide which service to go with? Good question. We are all in the middle of figuring this out. No service is 100% reliable and each service is going to have it's flaws. My current favorite for Contacts and Calendar is [Google Sync](#). If you are a Google person (Gmail email or have an Android phone) then definitely use [Google Sync](#). If you are an Apple person then another good choice might be the new iCloud service when it is unveiled this fall. But right now MobileMe is on its way out. And just to complicate matters the Google services integrate nicely with Macs and iPhones too. For large music collections look to [Amazon Cloud Player](#), [iTunes in the Cloud](#) or [Music by Google](#). For documents look to [Dropbox](#), [Google Docs](#) or [Office365](#).

Start slow, make sure the syncing process works for you and don't trust only the Internet to store your personal data.

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