



Collision Industry News & Information

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Cloud Computing: Sunny Surfing Or Growing Storm?

The collision industry is ever closer to shifting its computer operations away from the company's desktop to the concept referred to as cloud computing. But what inherent security risks will the migration to this ephemeral 'cloud' have and should you be prepared for the security risks developing around cloud-based computing?

Cloud computing is really nothing new, most computers based on wireless devices have already been flying through the clouds. An operating system or smart phone application, for example, that automatically updates itself while you're sleeping and dreaming is doing so in the cloud.

Blackberries, smart phones and other wireless communications devices are engineered to be cloud friendly and will perform all types of cloud-based activities, sometimes even without the owner's knowledge or consent. Yes, without the owner's consent. The reason for this is that the default security configurations of wireless devices make them extremely vulnerable. Unless one fortifies the default security setting of their wireless device the cozy cloud can quickly develop into a security supercell. But that is just one aspect of cloud insecurity.

It is not surprising that collision industry writers and commentators understate or underestimate the inherent security risks of the cloud. Information providers and suppliers naturally want to establish the most competitive computer-based platforms available. And cloud computing offers significant advantages. All existing versions of an estimating system, for example, can be updated in real time and user data can be uploaded to the cloud where it will be carefully cataloged, massaged, kneaded and commingled with other data to yield new insights into the performance parameters of local or regional shops.

Data accumulated in the cloud will be used to tweak the operational efficiencies that shops rely on. The growing cloud formations will definitely streamline operation and even generate higher profits; but for whom...collision repairers or insurers? And who will decide the definition of operational efficiencies or lean processing. Will these terms be defined as the quality of repair a claimant receives to be sure that a claimant is fully indemnified? Or will operational efficiency or lean processing be defined as the lowest cost of repair?

To answer those questions one has ask who controls the information accumulating in the cloud. Because whomever controls the information in the cloud will benefit most from cloud-based systems and applications. So who has availability to cloud data? Who will decide how data will be compared and analyzed? Which data from other sources will shop data be measured against and for what purpose? What input will shops have into the massive repository of information growing in the cloud? And what rights will you be automatically signing away when agreeing to those pesky Terms & Conditions that you must agree to if you want to soar in the cloud?

While cloud computing will grow at an exponential rate, users of cloud-based systems and applications must not underestimate the significant security and privacy risks that will be unleashed by cloud-based systems. Think of how often you have heard about security fixes and patches to everyday computer operating systems such as Windows. Hackers are constantly probing (and exploiting) such operating system vulnerabilities while programmers try to quickly fix and patch the security loopholes. It is an ongoing game of cat and mouse with no decisive winners. Now multiply the simple security vulnerabilities of a computer operating system by a million...that number represents the inherent security and privacy risks of cloud computing.

The ascension of personal and business computing into the cloud is inevitable but one should keep ones eyes open and throw a measure of caution to the large gray billows rising on the distant horizon.

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