A-head in the cloud!

By **Alan Knowsley**, managing partner, Rainey Collins Lawyers

You cannot read anything about IT without coming across the word 'cloud'. It seems pervasive and certainly is the current IT buzzword – it seems to be the solution to every problem!

Like many IT solutions, you need to understand its value and whether the cloud, cloud computing, cloud backup, and cloud applications actually work and are worthy of the hype that is being generated.

A basic search on the Internet provides a list of many benefits, however, it is difficult to quantify the benefits against the risks. This is especially true in New Zealand as many of the articles are US-based.

Some of the stated benefits are:

❯ **Hardware independence**
   ❯ Not dependant on one set of hardware, you are usually part of a cluster of servers sharing resources as required;
   ❯ Hardware is not on site, reducing hosting, servicing, and manpower costs;
   ❯ Server power and storage can be purchased or relinquished as required.

❯ **Business continuity**
   ❯ If hardware is hosted in a large distributed facility, there is protection from a single point of failure;
   ❯ Backups and restores occur away from the business;
   ❯ Business continuity can be maintained from the disaster recovery site out of town if necessary. The Internet is (almost) distance independent.

However, like all technology, there is a lot of uncertainty as the practitioners of IT learn how to build and control these environments. The cloud has also had its serious issues over the last few years:

❯ "Gmail outage passes 24 hours for some" (Seth Weintraub, *CNNMoney*, 28 February 2011).
❯ "Amazon Cloud Goes Down, Takes Every Hot Startup With It" (Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry, *Business Insider*, 21 April 2011).
❯ "10 Notable Cloud Outages And What Caused Them" (Andrew Hickey, CRN, 23 February 2010).
❯ "Google, Microsoft cloud crashes: Is this the new normal?" (Kevin McCaney, *Washington Technology*, 12 September 2011).
❯ "EMC Atmos Online goes offline, other cloud storage providers look to step up" (Dave Raffo, SearchCloudStorage, 2 July 2010).
❯ "Why Amazon's cloud Titanic went down" (David Goldman, *CNNMoney*, 22 April 2011).

The adoption of cloud technology is occurring, but like all IT developments has to be the right solution for you for the right reason. Cloud computing will grow; however, the IT industry is still learning how to manage these environments and as noted above, this still has attendant risks.

The examples above are, of course, extreme, however, they make the point about having to think about how you can use these services, but not feel you are lost 'amongst the clouds'.

What did we do?

In 2006, Rainey Collins reached a watershed decision on how to run its IT systems after being approached by an IT company whose business proposition was "we own your IT and work as part of your management team". Previously, we had engaged an IT service provider and managed this relationship as well as we could. However, this new relationship provided a solution for us without us having to know about the background technology. We wanted business outcomes not technical decisions. We would also be provided with the solution at a flat monthly cost which would give us budgetary certainty every year.

The solution was implemented six years ago and is a hosted service, ie on a 'private cloud' based in New Zealand.

Why did we go with this solution?

❯ It was all about the people. If there was a problem, we had the ability to contact an account manager who knew us and our business. We were not just amongst another bunch of servers based on remote out-of-country hardware; we wanted to work with the providers and not have a dispassionate relationship.
❯ The system is based in New Zealand. We were not at the mercy of the one and only Internet link out of New Zealand to the US (Southern Cross Cable), where many hosting centres are located.
❯ Our systems are located in a professional server farm (secure, multiple power supplies, firewalls etcetera), and now we are also backed up to a replicated farm 135 kilometres away from our offices.
❯ We would be unhappy to have our clients' information in another jurisdiction. We hold information sensitive and confidential to our clients, and overseas hosting centres operate under different privacy laws.
❯ Our cloud provider now has IT business interests stretching as far north as the Government of Niue (supported via satellite!), so we continue to be happy about their technical competence.

What have been the benefits?

While the cloud has benefits to our business, we were mindful about the need of having to have confidence in the provider if there was a chance of rain! Technology is changing and through this change has a chance of failure. We wanted to be able to contact someone locally in New Zealand.

In our case, a private cloud offered us the ideal blend of:

❯ local contact (direct line of communication);
❯ local knowledge (New Zealand-based);
❯ high-level technical skills (much higher skills sets available through the provider than we are able to provide);
❯ personal attention (we are a valued client);
❯ fiscal prudence (predictable monthly service and minimal capital costs);
❯ ability to scale the solution with only small cost increments (financial efficiency);
❯ risk spread (provider has multiple clients so the pressure is on them to perform consistently across their platform);
❯ a trusted partner (long-term relationship);
❯ off-site IT (we spend our time earning fees – not managing IT);
❯ business continuing to run in the event of a disaster (peace of mind); and
❯ high-level customer-service measurements (not detailed technical phrases eg email works, documents are available etcetera).

To some extent, we have 'just' taken our computing requirements to an off-site location, however, this is on a larger, shared facility with greater resilience than we could justify. Recently, this facility also provided us with the capability to run our office totally from the disaster recovery site.

The cloud does not provide a 'one size fits all' solution. In fact, there is some smog about, as providers and customers try and live up to the hype. Through our provider, we were able to be part of a larger environment than we could justify, thereby giving us a reliable system that is totally managed outside of our organisation.

Conclusion

So is it about the cloud, or is it a bit like smog or fog with the chance of a little rain? Our relationship with our provider has been excellent for more than six years. They have seamlessly migrated us to new application platform versions (eg email, MS Office) and also to new, more powerful hardware platforms as they upgrade their facility.

At Rainey Collins, we believe we are ahead of the game by being in the cloud! ⓃⓏ

Part four: Has work-life balance given way to work-life blending?

By **Julia Batchelor-Smith**, senior associate, Minter Ellison Rudd Watts

As a working mother, I am often asked whether I manage to achieve 'work-life balance'. This notion attained buzzword status in the nineties, and securing balance between the two spheres has been held out as the touchstone of a happy life ever since.

So, what does work-life balance really mean? Is it still achievable, or have we been looking at it all wrong? In today's society, is work-life *blending* a more realistic means of achieving happiness than striving for the outdated concept of balance?

By definition, the term 'work-life balance' denotes two competing forces. Too much of one means not enough of the other. So in its purest form, work-life balance is theoretically achieved when the on-the-clock hours piling up on one side of the scale don't outweigh those precious moments with loved ones on the other.

But here's the rub: what we're really seeking is not 'balance' per se; it's contentment at home and at work. And there's an increasingly popular school of thought that balance – even if you managed to achieve it – won't make you happy.

Effective blending, on the other hand, is the concept of having one contented life, rather than two that you interchangeably switch between. And I think it's a far more realistic goal (particularly for working mothers).

From a common-sense perspective, balancing work and home life must be an outmoded concept. Blackberries and iPhones are routinely provided by employers. Mobile numbers are printed on business cards. Checking emails at home is the norm rather than the exception. The lines between home and work are increasingly becoming blurred. I think we need to adapt accordingly by embracing that; by *blending* – and by giving up striving for balance once and for all.

Not convinced? This might sway you: your juniors are already blending – and they assume that you do too.

I am 33, which places me squarely within Generation X. We are the architects of the balance concept. But Generation Y (18-29 year olds) think differently.

Millennial Branding, a Generation Y research firm, recently conducted a study of over four million Generation Y Facebook users. It found that they see the lines between home and work as inherently blurred. On average, Generation Y-ers have 16 co-workers as 'friends' on Facebook. They think nothing of taking a work call out of hours and checking their work email at home (often as frequently as their personal accounts). The flip side is that Generation Y-ers want the work boundaries to blur too, manifesting in unfettered access to social networks at work and the freedom to take personal calls in working hours. They want what they are embodying: true work-life blend. They just *don't get* work-life balance. And as Generation Y-ers will represent three-quarters of the work force by 2025, it's worth paying attention to this new way of doing things.

Here's the trick – you need to embrace work-life blending *on your terms.*

Work-life blending doesn't have to mean that you're constantly on the clock; in fact, it shouldn't. If it's done right, blending your home and work lives can have a positive effect on your well-being and your overall enjoyment of your day-to-day life.

To make blending work:

❭ *Reframe your starting point:* Don't waste mental energy on trying to demarcate your happy place (home) from the place you begrudgingly go to from nine to five (work). Reframe your thinking: yes, you spend part of your life in one place, and part in another; however, both places are part of your (singular) life. Focus on the rewards that each provides (for example, work may offer professional fulfilment, an income to sustain your lifestyle, and a network of friends; while home is a sanctuary for relaxation, allows you to spend time with your family, and is a place to pursue other passions).

❭ *Set fluid boundaries:* If you accept that work will sometimes encroach on home, and vice versa, then you're far less likely to feel resentful. Make peace with your blended life. Sometimes, you will get called at home. Sometimes, you'll need to leave work to deal with a personal matter. And that's okay, as long as your boundaries are fluid enough to cope. Don't get yourself worked up about answering a work email at home. Deal with it, and get back to enjoying being at home.

❭ *Look for opportunities in your schedule:* For example, you may work five days a week, but feel as though you have no time for your friends. See your lunch breaks as an opportunity to schedule that long-overdue catch-up. Maybe you feel you don't have enough quality time with your partner. An out-of-town work trip may be an opportunity to tack on a long weekend, or a chance to see a friend in that city. View your commitments in a new light and look for the blending opportunities that arise from them.

❭ *Make it work for you:* In the wise words of Gandhi, "You must be the change you want to see in the world". Figure out what level of blending you're comfortable with, and adopt it wholeheartedly. Just as balance means different things to different people, so too does blending. The trick is working out what it means for you; embracing it – and maybe achieving balance through the back door as a result.

In my view, it's liberating to give up searching for that elusive work-life balance. Make peace with the blended way that we have to live, and focus your energies on contentment – whether you are at home or at work – instead. **NZL**

Do you think work-life balance is an outdated concept? Or do you agree that blending is a more positive means of achieving contentment? Email Julia: thelawsofmotherhood@gmail.com. Julia Batchelor-Smith is a senior associate with Minter Ellison Rudd Watts and mother of Allegra, aged two.