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History of cloud computing by Sarah Jacob

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Every year, newspapers trot out the same predictions of the future, including those made years ago that included ridiculous flights of fancy like hover boards and moon bases. One such prediction in the 60s was made by J. C. R. Licklider, a man responsible for the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET).

He mooted an â€œintergalactic computer networkâ€•, where the globe could access programs and data from anywhere. This idea seemed so entrenched in science fiction that you would be excused for believing his ramblings were doomed to join the other false prophecies, filed between robot butlers and three course meals in a pill.

Naysayers and cynics have however been proved wrong by Mr Licklider and if you look at his description of the â€œintergalactic computer networkâ€• again, itâ€™s easy to see the modern equivalent computing.

Cloud computing is essentially computing not as a product, but as a service that enables users to share data, resources and information online. Many attribute this concept to John McCarthy, a computer scientist who said in the 60s: â€œComputation may some day be organised as a public utility.â€ Since then, cloud computingâ€™s development has been chequered and varied, with any number of facets being explored and researched.

1999 saw the inception of Salesforce.com, a major milestone in cloud computing and the first enterprise to offer the pioneering concept of making applications available via a website. The first firm to offer this type of online service, Salesforce.com paved the way for other companies to follow suit and start offering applications via the Internet.

Next up was Amazon, with the introduction of its Web Services suite in 2002. Amazon offered cloud computing with a range of services including storage, human intelligence and computation with the help of its Amazon Mechanical Turk. IT professionals finally had a viable cloud-based option with many a network analyst and web developer making good use of Amazonâ€™s first foray into what was still a sector in its infancy.

Amazon then compounded this early success with the launch of its Elastic Compute cloud (EC2) in 2006. The EC2 was a commercial web service to help small enterprises and individuals rent computers in order to run their own programs and applications.

"Amazon EC2/S3 was the first widely accessible cloud computing infrastructure service," said Jeremy Allaire, CEO of the company that provides the SaaS online video platform to UK TV stations and newspapers, Brightcove.

Cloud computing really came into its own back in 2009 when Web 2.0 began to flex its muscles and the likes of Google and Microsoft offered browser-based applications.

The chief technology officer at service provider Cobweb Solutions, Dan Germain, believes this was the biggest step forward to what Licklider and McCarthy had envisioned.

"The most important contribution to cloud computing has been the emergence of â€™killer appsâ€™ from leading technology giants such as Microsoft and Google. When these companies deliver services in a way that is reliable and easy to consume, the knock-on effect to the industry as a whole is a wider

general acceptance of online services," he explained.

Despite its initial slow development, further technological advances have helped cloud computingâ€™s influence in recent years. Rolling out universal high-speed bandwidth has certainly helped, as has a global uniformity to a lot of software.

As an IT professional you will no doubt come into contact with cloud computing, and many roles (iOS developer, security consultant, software architect etc) will use it every day in a bid to improve productiveness and aid workload â€“ especially contract workers and freelance specialists. Cloud computing is the future and from humble beginnings and a slow start, it is now a viable option for the future with everything from televisions to games consoles adding it as a feature, and major companies considering the impact this technology could have on their products or workforce.

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