



10 Questions to Ask Your Cloud Service Provider

CLOUD CHAMPIONS

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By now the cloud should have become a cakewalk for enterprises. After all it has been around for years now. However, the reality is different. While awareness and knowledge levels regarding the cloud are growing, the complexities attached to it are as well. Issues related to transparency, pricing and what it covers, quality of underlying infrastructure, availability of expertise, monitoring and management challenges—it's as if a Pandora's box has opened up.

Progression strives to make the cloud, specially, Managed Cloud, easy for CIOs. Here are a few questions that IT professionals like you should ask cloud service providers; and their answers from Progression. These questions have been adapted from virtual.com's 30 Questions to Ask Before Turning to Cloud Computing.

1. Do I have full ownership of my data?

With Progression's Managed Cloud, yes, 100%! But is that true of all cloud service providers, especially the SaaS providers? Not necessarily. So this is the number one question to ask any service provider you work with.

Will your ERP data be hosted on a shared database instance? If it is, you are not likely to get your data out, easily. Even if you move on from the service provider, your data (as of the last day of your contract) will not!

With SaaS applications, you are likely to be on proprietary formats, so even if you do get the data out, you would still need the application to use it intelligently. Effectively, you're locked in.

2. How much does it cost to import my data? How much will it cost to export my data?

Progression does not charge additionally for data import or export, for nearly all cloud services we provide. We do not see it as an extra billable item. However, if the data is very large, or has complexities because of the nature of the application being used, we may ask for a nominal fee. This will be made aware to you well in advance, so there are no surprises.

Progression often exports the data on disk or tape and ships it to the customer or the authorized third party service provider, as the case maybe.

We do not believe in holding on to data just so the customer stays locked in. Usually, cloud customers do not factor in the price, ease of export/import, time taken for this process. Progression takes ownership of the process and gets the data to you.

We believe in the premise of the cloud model's ease of use and flexibility, and makes sure the customer is not disadvantaged, especially because of data not being made available.

A note of caution: Not all cloud service providers do this; they simply bill you for data import or export. Or ask you to download it off your network connectivity. We consider this as an arm twisting tactic, because gigabytes of data, as you already know, cannot be easily downloaded in this manner.

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3. How much does it cost to back up my data once it's in the cloud? How are backups implemented and how long is my data kept?

Progression recommends that you should consider signing up for our Backup as a Service at a nominal cost. Many contracts that we run have backups by default as part of the offering. The nominal fee is to cover the costs of a managed backup service and software licenses, so your team doesn't have to get engaged in tedious processes, when they could be involved in more strategic tasks. And if problems come up, our database and backup experts will handle them while keeping your team in the loop.

Progression also tailors backup policies as per your business objectives. So you get backups as per your business demands, not as per a service provider's standardized model or DIY (do it yourself) approach.

Progression follows industry-leading practices. Backups are implemented using HP and Veeam technologies. Our standard policy has a daily backup, with three days retention. However, if your business needs a different approach, Progression creates a policy that's aligned to your business.

4. How will I transfer my software licenses I currently own?

If you have existing software licenses from Microsoft, Progression enables their seamless transfer to our Managed Cloud. We work with your team to make it happen. Your licenses don't go waste, and your TCO and OpEx go down.

With other software vendors, cloud licensing models are still evolving, and we work with you proactively to educate you about the issues. Our objective is to help you be fully compliant and not face any issues related to licensing whatsoever.

5. Will my applications be running on server clusters?

We deliver high availability in our cloud. If a physical server goes down, another one seamlessly takes over. We have designed our server clusters on underlying high-performance SANs, which give us the ability to move across the servers easily. We also set up primary and secondary servers for specific applications and connect them with a heartbeat to help the secondary server take over as soon as any issue crosses its threshold in the primary one.

We also build individual Citrix server clusters for customers to enable rapid scalability and redundancy. And in almost all cases, there is no or very little impact on business. Our expertise in high performance computing gives us the ability to build clusters to tackle complex business problems.

6. Do you use an underlying IaaS? Or do you have your own infrastructure?

Be sure to ask this question. Server farms hosted in another country, or in some ill-fitted buildings are not what an enterprise needs for its business critical applications. Your enterprise applications need world-class infrastructure, running the latest-generation hardware and industry-leading software, on which your cloud service provider has direct physical access and control.

Progression offers Managed Cloud services from its Tier3+ data center. We work with enterprise cloud offerings on hardware certified for specific business applications. Our long-standing partnerships with HP, VMware, Microsoft, Cisco, Check Point and Citrix help us deliver the best-of-breed enterprise cloud solutions.

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7. What is the SLA? What happens if you don't meet it?

Progression has been in business for almost two decades now. We follow stringent SLAs and take on penalties that few people in the industry offer. And we are open to fine tuning the clauses and take on additional risk, if your business criticality demands it. Our SLAs are stringent (yet not unrealistic or misleading), measurable, and we have penalty clauses that hold us truly accountable. Many service providers offer clauses that are nothing more than tokenism in the name of penalty.

8. How is redundancy implemented within your environment?

When Progression built its Tier3+ data center, we designed it to have no Single Point of Failure. A Tier3 data center, according to the Uptime Institute, is concurrently maintainable and 'requires no shutdowns for equipment replacement and maintenance.'

We have three power sources to the data center (one from the utility, and two from DG sets). Every aspect has redundancy provided for: UPSs, air conditioning, networks, switches, racks, cabling, everything. We have built in 100% redundancy at every level.

This data center is not built to compete with the myriad hosting service providers in every nook and corner of the country. Progression's data center has been built to deliver high availability to production environments of business critical applications of enterprises, such as SAP, Oracle E-Business, Navision, Axapta, and so on. So, high availability and redundancy, is a given.

9. Can I change my cloud usage based on my business needs?

The very premise of cloud is elasticity, and not just for scaling up, but for scaling down as well. At Progression, we understand businesses have cycles or requirements that require them to have slow or rapid scaling up or down. And we align our services to these needs. For example, we help several of our clients test their applications on our cloud.

We can scale up or down your cloud infra, within a few minutes of your confirming the requirement, and we adjust the fee to the usage. We don't force you to complete a billing cycle, or hold you to a fine print in a contract. The cloud is to enable business, and our Managed Cloud delivers that.

10. Do you provide long-term price protection?

Yes, we have long term contracts with many enterprise clients. There are no surprises in it, no hidden costs. And if something unforeseen comes up, that is brought to the table for discussion. As a service provider, we have to deal with cost escalations such as increase in manpower, bandwidth or fuel costs, or power outages, but these are not passed on to the existing clients with long-term contracts. You get predictability for your business applications, as well as predictability about budgets.

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About Progression

Ever since its inception in 1995, Progression has been at the forefront of technology delivering outstanding IT infrastructure services to create significant business value for its customers. Today, Progression is a leading IT infrastructure service provider and Managed Cloud company. Progression delivers a comprehensive range of cloud offerings, remote management services, and managed hosting and DR services to its valued customers across the world.

With a team strength of 125 and growing, Progression has engineers trained and certified in designing, architecting, selling, servicing and optimizing computing infrastructure based on products from market leaders such as VMware, HP, Oracle and Microsoft. Progression is widely recognized for its passion to stay abreast of the latest technology innovations and breakthroughs. It has been a leader in Server virtualization/consolidation solutions, and builds Private Clouds and offers Public Cloud computing services for business critical applications.

Progression is ISO 27001:2013 certified and adheres to ITIL v3 standards in service delivery. The company has been recognized for its commitment to deliver the right solutions to customers through awards instituted by CRN, SME Channels, ITPV, VMware, and Hewlett Packard.

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