The Opportunity of the Cloud for Good

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aspirationtech.org/publications/publications/manifesto

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What are we talking about?

► What is “The Cloud”?  
► What I love (and love less) about cloud  
► Case studies on the same  
► Pictures real and imagined  
► Paths for nonprofits to contemplate  
► Whatever you all want to talk about
Who is Aspiration?

We work with stakeholders across the nonprofit software supply chain:

- We advise NGO technology decision makers on how to employ tech sustainably and affordably
- We advise vendors and developers on how and what to build for NGO users
- We advise funders on what and how to fund
Who is Aspiration?

► Most importantly, we support & advise
   End Users
    on how to apply technology
   On Their Terms
    to
   Achieve Impact
    in their
   Program and Mission Work :^)
What is the Cloud to Us?

► Apps running online, available remotely
  ▪ Maintained, improved by somebody else

► Data stored on web-accessible servers
  ▪ Collaboratively edited and curated by permissioned folks

► Access to all of the above from anywhere you have internet access
  ▪ Client devices play a simpler role
  ▪ Organizations can focus on workflow
Things I Love About the Cloud

► Real time collaboration
  - ...co-creating documents on a call...

► Openness
  - I can invite others into my work and thinking

► Focus-ability
  - Someone else worries about the layers I do not love

► Availability
  - e.g. when my laptop and I are out on separate dates
  - AKA rich support for “oops, I forgot to bring...”

► Serendipity
  - Due to all of the above, interesting things just happen
Cloud Case Study: Project Management

The problem(s)

- Nonprofit project management is hard
  (Some would declare that phrase an oxymoron)
- Too often done with clunktastic tools
- Project management processes are often opaque
- Many projects fail because efforts of stakeholders, resources not well integrated
- It's hard to know “what's going on”
- Project assets too rarely find unified, long-term, high-availability homes
Cloud Solution: Basecamp

- Hosted project management
  - www.basecamphq.com
- Simple set of essential features
  - Deadlines, docs, messages, reminders
- Per-project access and controls
  - Believable admin features
- Unified dashboard
  - Project deadlines, latest activity, status updates, new assets, active stakeholders
Latest activity across your projects

Review of overdue milestones

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| • Jessica and Uno arrive!  
• CMC Fundraiser Event  
Sacramento - 6pm | • Central Valley Training - Sacramento  
5:30am | • Central Valley Training - Modesto  
11:30am | • Build Your Nonprofit Website in A Day  
DFNFC 2pm |

28  29  30  31  Sep 1  2  3

View the full calendar
Basecamp Pros and Cons

► Basecamp rocks because
  ▪ Criminally simple: subverts resistance
  ▪ As a result, fairly ubiquitous paradigm
  ▪ It just kinda works

► Basecamp sucks because
  ▪ Criminally simple: features missing
  ▪ Weak integration with other cloud tools
  ▪ Lame data export/project migration
Basecamp changes our game

- Establishes collaboration zones
  - Private places to throw it all together
  - Relatively “organizational culture neutral”
- Reduces collaboration boundaries
  - No custom firewall access to servers
- Preserves organizational memory
  - Across fire drills and turnover
- Drives accountability and transparency
  - Your laundry is on(the)line
Case Study 2: BART Protests
Let's get conceptual...

There are 2 ways of envisioning Cloud

- The way it is sold
- The way it works in practice
- ...and we've got pictures

We look at cloud through a lens of organizational development

- Goal: .orgs control their technology destiny
- The path to the same is workflow-driven
- Our mantra: “Sort the Technology Last”
The Cloud of Lore

Source: http://crenk.com/the-cloud-in-the-classroom/
Our Cloud of NPTech Reality

aspirationtech.org
Control in the NPTech Cloud

- Nonprofits should follow cloud strategies that maximize their control over long-term destiny.
- Much comes down to what routes through your domain name.
  - “Why Facebook=Enterprise #FAIL for us”
- The game is figuring out what makes sense to store at what layer of control.
It's all about the Data

► Tragedy of the 501 “990-driven” reality
  ▪ There are budget line items for software
  ▪ There are budget line items for hardware
  ▪ There are budget line items for labor
  ▪ There are rarely line items for DATA

► Apps are vessels to story and carry data
  ▪ As you consider cloud, it's about the DATA
  ▪ Your DATA is your digital power
  ▪ Center your cloud thinking on this truth
Control in the NPTech Cloud

► We look at the cloud as 4 layers of enterprise leverage

1) Stuff within our domain name on servers we own and admin
   - e.g. vpn to internalserver.aspirationtech.org
   - “meh”, but an essential option to know you have

2) Stuff behind our domain name on servers we contractually control on terms we like
   - e.g. our Drupal and Wordpress sites hosted at rochen.com
   - “woof”, “yum”
Control in the NPTech Cloud

We look at the cloud as 4 layers of enterprise leverage

3) Stuff behind our domain name on application servers we don't control
   - e.g. Wordpress.com, Google for Domains
   - The idealized cloud of “I don't think about IT or hosting hassles”
   - Redundancy and long-term support become more of a concern
   - You retain your (theoretical) ability to point at something else

4) All Other Stuff (aka “minimal control of our destiny”)
   - Basecamp, Facebook, Twitter, bit.ly, Flickr, YouTube ...
   - Your mileage is guaranteed to vary
   - If you love yourself, keep local copies of anything that matters
Aspiration's Cloud Checklist

► All tech relationships should be predicated on divorce
  - “Pre-nup thinking” becomes critical

► Relationship Questions to ask about cloud options
  - Can we put it behind our (sub) domain?
  - Can we talk to other clouds in this relationship?
  - Who else is this cloud hanging out with?
  - Can we leave when we want?

► Asset questions to ask...
  - Can we export our data on demand in open, complete formats?
  - Is our data really our data?
  - Is our data secure, encryptable, private?
  - Who else can look at our data?
The Other Thing: The Big “I”

- Online enterprise identity is unsolved
  - We all manage dozens of credentials
  - “Fragmented” is an understatement
  - Battle for control of online identity rages

- The other other “I” thing online
  - Org identity and individual identity blur
  - “Can you invite my GMail, not my .org”
  - You need clear policies for distinguishing
So What to Do?

► Focus on three poles of NPTech
  ▪ First People
  ▪ Then Process
  ▪ Last Technology

► Do incremental research and migration
  ▪ Acknowledge that cultural change is hard
  ▪ Leverage opportunity to improve processes
  ▪ Don't make any big cloud bets right away
Migration approaches

► Take a workflow-oriented approach
  ▪ Consider cloud for related sets of processes, tasks, outcomes

► Which workflows are least effective now?
  ▪ Distinguish mission critical versus “the rest”
  ▪ Start with non-mission-critical workflows :^)

► Have a stated goal
  ▪ Explore cloud-based ways of achieving the same

► “Technology challenges are organizational development opportunities in disguise”
For me, now, the cloud enables workflows like

- Collaboration on documents
  - Discipline with tools is biggest challenge

- Online Publishing
  - Publishing, maintaining, tracking metrics

- Project management
  - How was it I did this before cloud?

- For other folks, there are many others
  - CRM, finances, campaigning, fundraising, ...
  - All of the above are candidate migrations
The NPTech Cloud is young

► Enterprise data management
  ▪ We need more than a new place to store data silos
  ▪ Many apps don't understand how nonprofits work

► Identity, identity, identity
  ▪ Stuff needs to talk to stuff on OUR terms
  ▪ It's a tough, unsolved problem
  ▪ This is where to be wary in placing bets

► Interoperability, interoperability, inter...
  ▪ Prioritize open standards, long-term APIs, free/open src

► Rich offline synchronization
  ▪ Because single-points-of-failure are so 1970's
The Opportunity for Good

► The Cloud is not a fad
  ▪ And it really can increase impact

► Intentionality is key to migration
  ▪ Involve all users in process from Day 0
  ▪ Base migration on workflows, not tools
  ▪ Assert control and portability of your data
  ▪ Maximize control of your online identity
  ▪ Have fallback plans at the ready
  ▪ Rinse and repeat
The Opportunity for Good

► The cloud gets nonprofits to better places
  ▪ Innovative ways of engaging and building allies, audiences, support, awareness
  ▪ Collaboration, cost savings, convenience
  ▪ Ability to focus on impact, not on IT

► These are exciting times for new paradigms
  ▪ There is more than one way to get there
  ▪ The journey should be the .org reward
  ▪ Make your organization's path one of greatest sustainability, not least resistance :^)
Thank You!
Questions?