Living in the "cloud"
By Sonia Blizzard

In this day and technological age, as people flock to the cloud, can you really keep your "clouds" separate?

In this article, internet security expert and MD of Beaming, Sonia Blizzard, discusses the work-life balance element of the cloud, as well as how lives are lived, literally, on the cloud.

It's not an uncommon circumstance for people to scope out social media profiles – prospective employers for example – when they want to get a feel for a personality. But, as people flock to the cloud for business and pleasure, is it really possible to keep clouds separate, and, have we actually found ourselves "living in the cloud"?

Data can be stored on the cloud in many different ways, and as we go along with our lives, we find that we store more and more on the cloud every day. Ever since the introduction of tablets and unlimited data storage on the cloud, it has become a norm for us to find our photos, our music, documents and any number of other articles of data sitting on the cloud.

We, as a population, use the internet on a daily basis for a wide variety of purposes, including for the transmission of sensitive data, and are we giving a second thought to the safety and security of our information?

In general, individuals and businesses use the internet for purposes including social media, research, entertainment, banking, communication, download and upload, amongst many other things. You could forgive me for saying that many people, if not

most, have a general attitude of complacency when it comes to using the internet and their first thought when it comes to logging on is not about how safe their data is. That thought is most likely way down at the bottom, if not off the list completely, behind thoughts surrounding social communication, business and commerce.

The question that should be on the lips of most business owners, and individuals, should be whether their data is ever really safe and what they can be doing to ensure that it is so. One thing to note is that safety should not simply cover theft, whether that is virtual or physical theft, it should also cover natural disasters, accidental loss or damage, and any other circumstance that could lead to a business or individual losing important or sensitive data.

It is one thing to experiment with the cloud, working it out slowly and discovering whether or not you really think it's for you, but it's a completely different kettle of fish to find yourself pushed into using it by circumstance. Damage your computer or network server and you may find yourself forced into relying on the cloud for every little thing while your top speed iMac is in the repair shop and you're stuck with a loaned PC for a week.

What you might not realise is that to some extent you are already living on the cloud and the best move you can make from here is to surrender to the concept of relying on the cloud, and allow yourself and your business to engage completely. The cloud will eventually become the most important aspect of our work lives, as much as it has become the central sphere for the

personal lives of every social media user in the world. Businesses that are resistant to this shift are only delaying the inevitable, and in fact, by resisting the move to the cloud you will only make your business more vulnerable than those that are enjoying the security and the benefits of the cloud.

We understand that businesses in particular are apprehensive of allowing their entire operation to function out of the cloud, but by being smart about where your data is kept and which security measures you take to protect and back up your information, the cloud can become the safest place for you to store files and folders.

Your data is managed on the cloud where it is easier to protect from any kind of physical threat, and with certain measures in place you will also receive more protection against power surges, cyber-attacks and any technological fault. Having your data backed up onto the cloud is the safest choice for businesses, and that can be proven by the amount of money that experts expect businesses to spend on cloud security over the next few years.

US businesses spend billions of dollars per year on protecting themselves against cyber threats and breaches, so I wouldn't be surprised if UK laws should soon follow laws set in the USA which force companies to implement security features around their cloud usage. Recent government guidance* made reference to the data protection responsibilities of companies that back up devices to the cloud and due to high profile security breaches regarding customer data, it is likely that this will remain a hot topic.

That is company data but what about data we accumulate as individuals? We, on a personal level, rely on cloud based storage for social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter, and employers have started using these sources to research potential employees and to discover more about these people through these sites. Does this mean, therefore, that by living on the cloud we are no longer entitled to a private life that is entirely removed from our professional living, or can we keep our personal and professional lives separate?

Cloud living does, unfortunately, mean that there is more chance of privacy being breached by our employers, which will tempt some people to choose to remain entirely professional on the internet. However, some will argue that what we do on the internet and outside of the office is an entirely separate segment of our lives and no reflection on our professional manner. Those in particularly influential careers such as teaching or public service will often consider using the most secure privacy features on all of their social media channels, using different names and making their profiles unsearchable.

While these are successful measures when it comes to ensuring your personal privacy, living on the cloud has made it necessary for us to think about the confidentiality of out-of-hours activities, something which would not have been a passing thought to anybody not in the public eye before the introduction of cloud storage. Has living on the cloud taken things too far, or is this a new level of normality that we will have to become used to? Judging by the way that things are going, it is the latter, which is why it is even more important that your cloud security is of the highest grade.

Cloud storage is as much of a consideration for individuals as it is for businesses, and it is perhaps this work / life balance that is increasingly seeing us juggling our privacy between the two sections of our daily existence. Information

technology has led to huge advances in the quest for an equal work / life balance, including allowing software which enables employees to work on projects both in the office and at home, email clients which synchronise to home and work, and instant messaging programs that can alert your smart phone should you not be in the office.

At first glance, these measures sound like the perfect solution to the pulls from both home and work, but does this mean that we are simply living on the cloud, making ourselves available to anybody, anywhere we are, no matter what we are doing?

Accessing your work network while you're at home, and being able to get hold of your home stuff remotely will certainly have its advantages, but it will also mean that those twenty minutes you have to spare in between putting the kids to bed and making your own dinner could be easily seized by work, unbalancing the scales of work and private time.

On the other hand, those twenty minutes might be exactly what you needed to finish off the project that you didn't have time to complete in the office because you had to leave early to do the school run.

In order to achieve a more equal work / life balance, it would seem that we are now literally living on the cloud, relying on cloud storage for almost every aspect of our being, including communication, business, entertainment and even finances. While this would seem to be a good thing, and is the next logical step in making use of the world's evolving technology, individuals and businesses should think about how this will affect their privacy, their security and their lives, because while a cloud might be comfortable to sit on, if the cloud bursts a hard landing awaits.
*https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bring-your-own-device-guidance

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Sonia Blizzard is the Managing Director of Beaming – a company that provides secure internet connectivity and data back-up services to a number of businesses across the UK. Coming from a corporate background in the telecoms industry, Sonia worked for a firm which is now known as BT Global Services, setting up Beaming in 2004. The company bridges the gap between actual business needs and IT; specifically the broadband and telephone connectivity that's vital for running a business day to day.

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