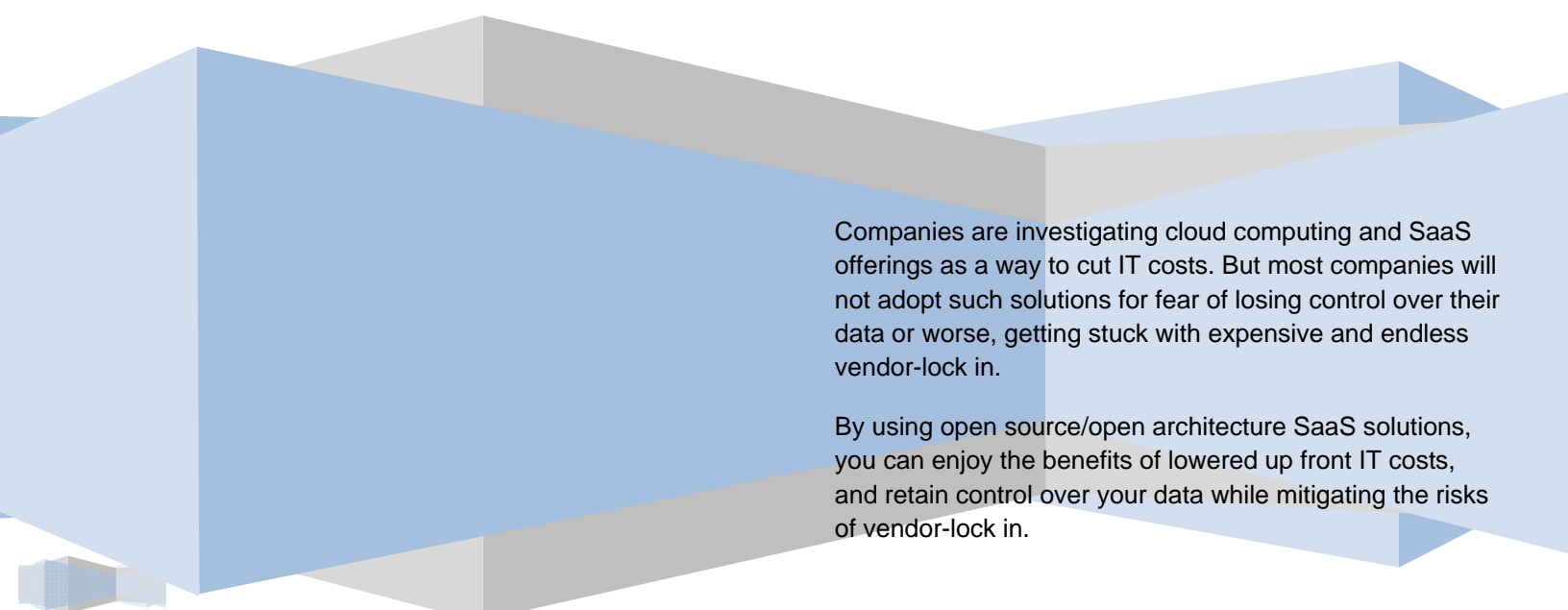


Open Source SaaS for Docs

Secure Data without Vendor Lock-In using an Open Source Docs Platform



Companies are investigating cloud computing and SaaS offerings as a way to cut IT costs. But most companies will not adopt such solutions for fear of losing control over their data or worse, getting stuck with expensive and endless vendor-lock in.

By using open source/open architecture SaaS solutions, you can enjoy the benefits of lowered up front IT costs, and retain control over your data while mitigating the risks of vendor-lock in.

Introduction

Many organizations would like to decrease up-front IT costs by incorporating the SaaS model as an outsourced approach to managing spreadsheets and other critical business documents, but hesitate because of the risks of permanently consolidating critical data, IT infrastructure, and IP assets onto the servers of vendors outside of the firewall.

By eliminating the need for hardware and replacing up-front license fees with 'pay-as-you-go' utility pricing, these rapidly maturing SaaS and Cloud Computing offerings can cut costs and lower the barrier to entry for many IT functions.

However, most companies will not adopt such solutions for fear of losing control over their data or worse, getting stuck in endless vendor-lock in—where the future of their IT infrastructure is completely in the hands of one or two powerful vendors.

Some software publishers are addressing these concerns by offering a hybrid approach to SaaS, delivering SaaS web applications through premise-based, downloadable server platforms. Unlike pure-SaaS products, these applications can be run behind the organization's firewall and allow storage of data in any database or file system. Furthermore, some solutions provide open source licensing which further lowers the risk of vendor-lock in. The result is lowered up front IT costs, maximum customization and flexibility, and control over vital data without the risks of vendor-lock in.

With a cross-platform solution, such as one that is Java based, you can run your applications on the server of your choice. And with open source licensing, you don't have to rely on third-party vendors to extend your applications, you can customize and extend the source code with any functionality you need.

The Exponential Cost of Vendor Lock-In

Once a company adopts a closed system, the total cost of ownership can be immense.

With solutions like SharePoint, organizations find themselves in a situation where they must purchase entire product stacks including expensive server operating systems, database software, application servers, and desktop applications. After adding in client access licenses, and desktop operating system software, the total cost of ownership can rival the very bottom-line savings that the system is supposed to provide.

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Once a decision is made to adopt these products, you can't just pick up and leave any time in the future without significant migration costs. In an article on ZDNET, Matt Asay argues, "Once you use SharePoint, the costs of switching start rising exponentially. Within a year they become impossible. And you can't just shift off SharePoint at that point -- you can't shift off any Microsoft product. You have to pay what Microsoft demands on into eternity."

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Using a Cross Platform Open Source/Architecture Solution

The benefits of using a cross platform/browser solution gives you the ability to run your application anywhere at any time. This means your software can run anywhere and your architecture can be resized or migrated without limitations. You can access your docs just as easily on Firefox as on Opera or Internet Explorer. On the server, laptop, or desktop, if you use Java technology, you remove any limitations as to what operating system you run on.

Utilizing a code base that is open source has many benefits to developers. They can access the source code to customize it to their needs. And there is no way that the code can be taken away at any point in the future. By choosing an open source system, organizations have the freedom and choice to work on the code as they see fit.

Privacy and Security Risks — the Unseen Costs of SaaS

Many SaaS providers host your data on their servers, providing lower upfront costs. However these offerings come with the very real hidden costs of privacy, uptime, and security risks.

Some businesses are routinely putting their most valuable data assets in the hands of a company whose stated mission is to “organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful” (2), an organization that makes nearly all of their revenue from advertising.

We all understand that the basic business model of an advertising company is to expose content and data so that it can be attractive for advertisers. This represents an essential conflict of interest and misalignment of the vendors’ goals with the needs of their customers—which is for secure, reliable and private access to their documents.

Once data is housed on a host's servers, you technically lose physical control of your data. You can no longer turn off a hard disk or delete a document and know for certain that you have removed all access.

This type of SaaS can be a problem in an increasingly litigious and audited society; it can be difficult to control administrative or legal access to your files. Some unfortunate users discovered this in a privacy breach where documents stored on Google's servers were accidentally shared with other parties (3) — technical glitches in a SaaS infrastructure can make critical data available to competitors without any recourse.

With a hosted-only document solution, the ability to lower or eliminate downtime is completely dependent on your provider. The cost of using the service and ability to access vital data are also dependent upon your provider and may be changed unilaterally. Finally, there is no way for you to completely eliminate any keyword tracking or third party code being executed in the browser.

In the example of Google, with Google docs and Gmail, user actions are tracked and recorded through web server logs and small JavaScript code. Essentially, with closed-source web applications such as Google Docs, and Microsoft Excel Online, you can never know for sure what type of tracking and monitoring you are being subjected to.

With an open source web front end, developers can easily examine the source code, discover what is in there and what is not, and are free to change and customize the application at will.

Take Back Control, Slash IT Costs, and Lower Risks

Currently, independent software vendors (ISVs) are developing hybrid open source/open architecture solutions that address the critical issues of security, data control and vendor lock in.

By using a product stack that includes an open source and architecture platform, you can mitigate the risks associated with closed systems and do so at a fraction of the price of a proprietary server stack.

Here are some of the primary benefits:

- Open source ensures that no third party tracking code is risking security.
- Flexible Java architecture: Run your applications on your servers, on any operating system, in the cloud with Amazon's Web Services, on desktops, or on laptops.
- No Vendor Lock-In: Open source web spreadsheets that support the latest office formats can be imported into other solutions for document management and can be edited in office applications and customized at will.
- No additional client install monies: with a browser based AJAX solution end users have zero client install.
- Open source software eliminates up-front licensing costs and drives down the total costs of new projects. Source code can be completely customized and extended without the risk of having it taken away by vendor.
- In general, companies that offer open systems have less expensive licensing.

About ExtenXLS 360

ExtenXLS 360 Spreadsheet Server™ (E360™) is a multi-platform spreadsheet management and collaboration tool with a sophisticated enterprise content management system and open source web spreadsheet.

E360 was created for corporate, small and medium sized businesses that need the flexibility and choice of a web-based open source spreadsheet and document management system that can run on any platform without vendor lock-in.

Professional open source licensing allows for seamless integration with mixed-source vertical applications and OEM products. E360 runs the open source Sheetster™ web spreadsheet—which includes a CMS system. With E360, users can create and edit documents and spreadsheets and collaborate with groups in a secure web based environment.

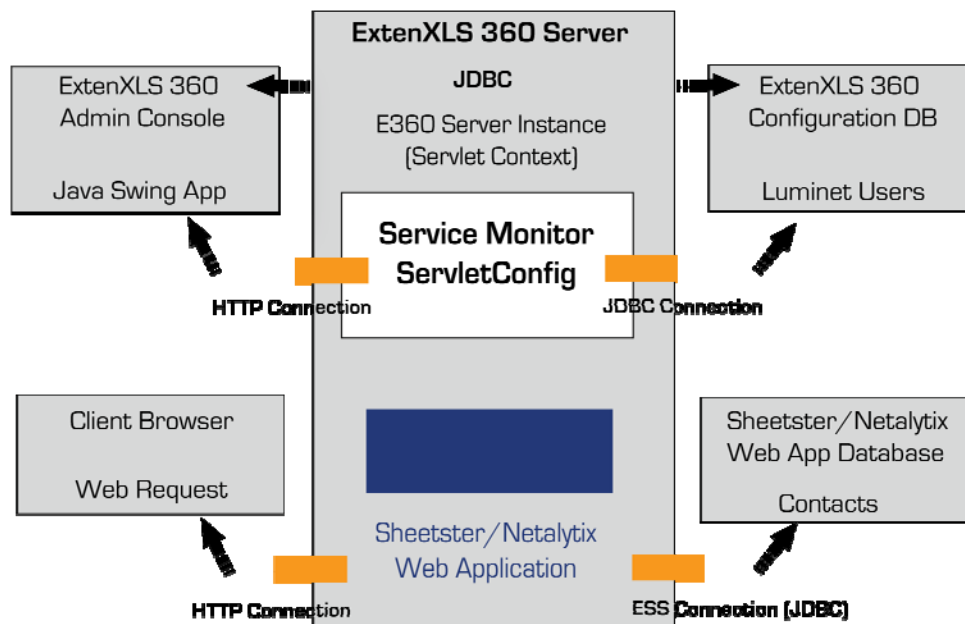


Figure 1: Typical E360 Deployment Diagram

ExtenXLS 360 supports reading and writing *Excel 2007 file format and has many collaboration tools, such as real time document collaboration, chat, and fine-grained role-based security and sharing.

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Administrators and developers retain full control of their data by storing document information in the database of their choice. In addition, developers can access the ExtenXLS Java

Spreadsheet SDK and RESTful APIs, that allow conversion of spreadsheet formulas to instant RESTful web services.

ExtenXLS 360 Collaboration Edition is free software and is available for download at:

www.extentech.com

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