

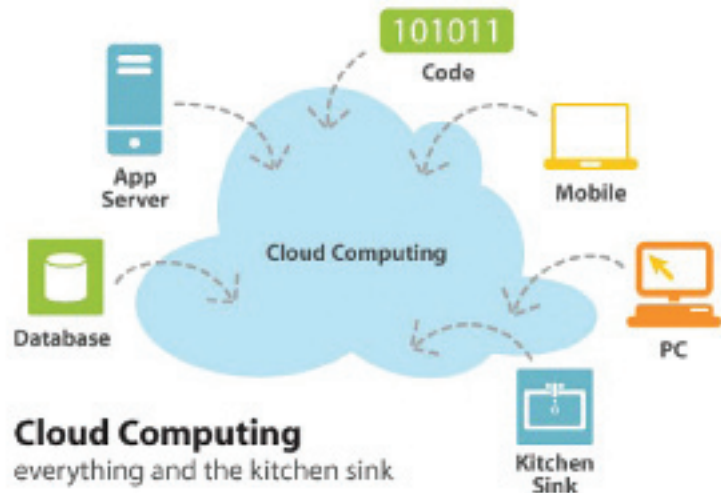
CLOUD-FIRST POLICY

U.S. agencies migrating to Web

—by Marjorie Censer

The General Services Administration’s decision in early December to move its e-mail program to a Web-based system modeled on Google’s popular Gmail program is part of a major government drive to increase federal use of cloud computing.

The GSA is the first federal agency to make the Internet switch; its decision follows the Office of Management and Budget’s declaration last month that the government is now operating under a “cloud-first” policy, meaning agencies must give priority to Web-based applications and services.

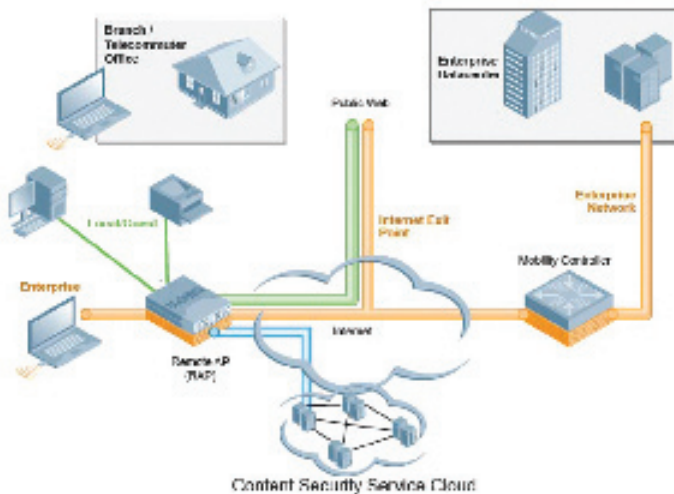


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As part of the move to a web-based e-mail system, GSA recently awarded a \$6.7 million, five-year task order to Unisys, a Pennsylvania-based contractor with an extensive local presence. Unisys is partnering with Google, Tempus Nova, and Acumen Solutions to deploy and manage the system.

Under the contract, GSA will migrate 17,000 e-mail accounts to the cloud. The new system is projected to cost about half as much as the existing one to manage, but the new system will be easier to upgrade.

GSA users will see some similarities between their federal e-mail and Google’s consumer Gmail, which should shorten the learning curve when the new software is introduced. Federal officials hope that GSA’s shift will encourage more federal organizations to embrace cloud computing for e-mail and other applications. Cloud-focused contractors, whose numbers continue to grow, are also hoping that the move results in more business. [*The Washington Post*, December 5, 2010]



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Government information-technology contractors, many of them based in the Washington area, have been anticipating the shift for months, trying to position themselves for future work.

The Obama administration has said that cloud computing will allow more people to share a common infrastructure, cutting technology and support costs. But some technologists have warned that Web-based software may not be as secure as systems built for a dedicated purpose. And the programs often depend on stable network connections.

The push for Web-based computing is part of a broader government effort to consolidate its 2,100 data centers by at least 40 percent by 2015.

