



Barbara H. Lange

Is It Cloudy Out There?

When I worked at the IEEE, the Institute would issue predictions for the upcoming decade's technology trends. I do not remember the exact year, but I distinctly recall a forecast that in the next ten years, we would share computing power in "the cloud." The term "the cloud" conjured up images of this network of computers floating in the sky, all connected. I could not quite figure out how my little laptop (or maybe it was still a desktop) would be taking advantage of this service. I figured this would only be useful to big companies.

Now, a decade later, the cloud is everywhere. But what is this cloud really? According to Microsoft Azure,¹ cloud computing is the delivery of computing services—including servers, storage, databases, networking, software, analytics, and intelligence—over the internet to offer faster innovation, flexible resources, and economies of scale.

Nearly every industry in the world is using the cloud as a foundation for their infrastructure. It enables large companies to gain economies of scale, while smaller companies can do more and make themselves look bigger, because the cloud offers them services at prices they could never support on their own.


We know that media travels through the cloud every day, but did you know that manufacturing companies use the cloud to improve their supply chain management as well as to optimize "just in time" production? Or that fintech, the technology used in financial services, lives in the cloud providing reliability for businesses and consumers around the world?

Even with the pervasive use of the cloud in media tech, there are still many challenges and opportunities for our industry. This is why we launched the Media in the Cloud (MiC) initiative earlier this year as our new President, Hans Hoffmann, took the reins at SMPTE. As an initial step, we formed an MiC Advisory Group of industry leaders to help us better understand the pain points with managing media workflows and systems in the cloud. This group, headed by Richard Welsh and Larissa Goerner, has been meeting to discuss the issues and what SMPTE can do to help address them. Already, there have been positive results.

The first was a successful virtual event that was held on 31 August, as part of our SMPTE+ event series. Titled "Migrating Media and Entertainment into the Cloud: A Real-World Perspective," this event addressed many aspects of the cloud that remain at issue, from dealing with current technology challenges to understanding

the real-world business considerations. We ended the day with a look toward the future and how emerging technologies will enable us to do even more in the cloud. I would like to thank Sally Hubbard for her fine work leading the program committee on this journey. SMPTE members who missed the session can view it on-demand from the SMPTE.org website.

A second positive outcome of the advisory group was the development of an educational course—delivered virtually—based on the foundations of media in the cloud. Despite the many years of working in the cloud, we know there are many technologists who still need more information to fill out their knowledge base in this domain. So, to fulfill our commitment to providing education on emerging technologies, we launched the new course "Understanding Media in the Cloud" on the SMPTE website. Here, I would like to thank Ian Trow for his efforts in crafting the course to suit the needs of our industry.

Without the cloud, our new life of remote working would have been very difficult to achieve. The cloud makes many wonderful things possible, and I am sure it will only increase in value and stature over the coming years. Now, what are the next set of predictions to which we should be paying attention? 

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