

powering UP

The Pros & Cons of Web-Based vs. Client/Server Software

by Sean Clouse



Just as there are two kinds of everything in the world, we now have two kinds of software: Web-based and client/server. Web-based (aka "hosted") software, typically resides externally on an applications service provider's (ASP) network; whereas client/server (aka "in-house") software is run internally on your own computer network. Each type has its pros and cons. Here are just a few:

Costs

Pros: Web-based – Software is typically offered on a subscription or usage basis, keeping you in control of the costs and allowing you to grow into the software without a huge upfront expense.

Pros: Client/server – You're in control of upgrades and can cut ties with the software provider if you don't want newer features or support.

Cons: Web-based – Subscriptions tend to be ongoing, so that over time, the software can appear to cost more than an in-house application (though a true cost comparison would have to include many other factors).

Cons: Client/server – Software is usually paid for up front, and the initial cost can be high. Moreover, if the software doesn't turn out to meet your needs, you'll be stuck with the expense for a product you can't use. Also, licensing may require a service contract of as much as 20 percent of the software cost per year, whether you use it or not.

Environment

Pros: Web-based – The hardware, the operating system, and the database software are included in the price of the application. There's no internal

cost to your company to purchase, maintain, or upgrade the network.

Pros: Client/server – Internal staff are in full control of the environment. You can make IT decisions that you feel are best.

Cons: Web-based – The computing environment is typically shared with other customers. Although databases are separate and secure, system load can be a factor.

Cons: Client/server – All costs to purchase, maintain, and upgrade the network are on your shoulders and that is typically not your company's core competency.

IT support

Pros: Web-based – Your IT staff is virtually uninvolved in system upgrades, user seat software, or database migrations, making your exposure virtually nil.

Pros: Client/server – System upgrades, user seat software, and database migrations happen when you choose, not on the ASP's schedule.

Cons: Web-based – You don't have a say in the management of the network and can be subject to the availability of the ASP's network administrators.

Cons: Client/server – You bear all the expense of upgrades, and the software vendor can push as many new revisions at you as it chooses.

User seats

Pros: Web-based – User seats are typically sessions on a server and not actually software on the user's computer, allowing access to the system by a larger user base—even customers and vendors.

Pros: Client/server – Applications tend to run faster when they're local to the user's computer.

Cons: Web-based – Remote software requires access to the Internet, so users can't typically make database changes when offline. Data also has further to travel, which can cause slower screen response time.


Cons: Client/server – Typically, each user seat must be paid for regardless of how active the user is, pushing you into purchasing seats for users who may seldom use the application.

System access

Pros: Web-based – The software is accessed from anywhere with a standard browser and an Internet connection.

Pros: Client/server – The software is accessible through the local network, creating a reasonably quick response and providing autonomy from the Internet.

Cons: Web-based – Access requires an Internet connection.

Cons: Client/server – Users must be on the local network to access the software unless the company has invested in a remote access application such as Citrix or PC Anywhere. Remote access applications require additional user software. 

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