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Grey sky thinking on the cloud

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<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e88b37e2-c0db-11dd-b0a8-000077b07658.html>

Let us poke our heads once more into the gathering cloud that is about to revolutionise IT - or perhaps not.

I asked readers for thoughts on "the cloud", which involves computing being accessed via the internet, at the end of my note in the November 19 edition of Digital Business.

Lindsey Armstrong of salesforce.com responded by pointing out some benefits: "Cloud computing achieves a quicker return on investment than the traditional 'on-premise' approach to enterprise IT, while removing much of the management overhead."

Willy Chiu, an IBM vice-president in its "on-demand solutions" division, said, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the cloud's a good thing, too: "Datacentres will become factories for industrialised services, allowing consumers to use technology in simple, elegant ways."

So far, so positive. Surely, this could not go on. It took a lawyer to sound a note of caution. Andrew Scott, a partner at Dickinson Dees, said: "The problem with cloud computing is its lack of transparency." That was the easy bit; you can read about the three potential legal pitfalls he outlined in a longer version of this article on FT.com.

So what might the cloud mean? Will there eventually be just a single version of each program, tool, song, etc in the world that everyone can access? Is that not all we need - assuming a fat enough pipe to enable us to reach what we want instantly?

Probably not. I fear it more likely that datacentres will proliferate, countries and big companies will each demand their own, and the cloud will, for some time, sit heavily on top of everything we already have. *For a longer version of this column, plus Personal View articles by Jim Hietala, writing for the Jericho Forum, and Russ Daniels of HP, go to www.ft.com/digitalbusiness.
