



White Paper:
**Making the
Case for the
Cloud:
Leveraging
Collaboration in
a Digital World**

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IP COMMUNICATIONS
RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Prepared for:



July, 2017

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Executive Summary

For many businesses, the cloud has become a strategic decision, and one that goes beyond considerations for collaboration. Until recent times, technology investments were driven by the needs of the network, but now they are being driven more frequently by the needs of the business. In this scenario, IT must focus on how to drive productivity, improve processes, and stay current with constantly changing technology – all with constrained budgets and scaled-back resources.

Premise-based communications solutions remain widely-used, but face growing challenges to address these new demands. Ultimately, businesses must become more agile - and collaboration plays a key role in enabling both individuals and teams in achieving this objective. This also means adapting to a digital world where information flows freely and real-time communication has never been more important.

There is a lot at stake for businesses to remain competitive. This white paper presents a considered analysis for deploying cloud-based solutions for communication and collaboration. The analysis begins by examining the changing technology environment that is amplifying the limitations of most premise-based systems. From there, the benefits and use cases of the cloud are reviewed, along with the strategic factors needed to build the business case. To conclude, key considerations for choosing a communications and collaboration partner are assessed, along with our view as to how ShoreTel embodies those qualities.

Technology Changes and Challenges

Before a case can be made for the cloud, proper context is needed, especially in terms of how technology in general is impacting the business. The drivers for this are occurring both inside your business as well as the broader external environment. As such, some will be specific to your organization, but other factors are horizontal, impacting all businesses regardless of size or structure. The common thread is that all these drivers present challenges which will impact decisions about technology, especially related to the cloud.

Table 1 – Drivers of Change - Internal

Driver	Cloud Implications
Cost reduction	This is an ongoing, global challenge facing businesses of all sizes. In terms of communications technologies, a key issue is moving away from legacy systems, which are capital-intensive to acquire, support and maintain.
Pace of technological change	Only the most fully-staffed IT teams have a chance of keeping pace, but even they struggle. Technology change is both constant and complex, making it futile to future-proof from within. Change is coming from familiar and unfamiliar sources, raising the stakes for IT, especially around long-term, major technology decisions.
Supporting a distributed organization	Many factors are leading businesses to consider distributed models for operations, especially related to occupancy costs and the need for increased agility to support customers and suppliers. Changing work styles also play a role. With more employees working remotely and in mobile settings, this model is difficult to support with premise-based technology.
Managing a changing workforce	As the workplace trends younger, IT is often faced with technology expectations that cannot be supported with current systems. Not only are workers increasingly mobile both inside and outside the office, but they have more control than ever in terms of the applications and endpoints used at work. Overriding this is the need to support a workforce spanning three or more generations, with a wide range of comfort for adopting new technologies.

Table 2 – Drivers of Change - External

Driver	Cloud Implications
The cloud	Communications technology is a small and rather recent part of the cloud story that seems to dominate the innovation landscape. As both applications and infrastructure continue ascending to the cloud, the rationale gets stronger for everything else. That said, the real-time nature of applications like Voice over IP (VoIP) and unified communications (UC) present specific challenges, and these use cases need to be carefully considered.
Digital transformation	This is another meta-trend that impacts all sectors of the economy, and businesses are not all moving at the same pace. While the impact of digital transformation is not fully understood, these changes are occurring, and every business needs a strategy. Whatever form that strategy takes, it will become increasingly cloud-based, with premise-based technology playing a more limited role.
Globalization	The Internet has made globalization practical for businesses of all sizes. While this opens up new markets, it also enables more competition. Ultimately, this is a zero-sum game, but for businesses that leverage the right technologies, the upside can be lucrative. Being borderless, scalable and cost-effective, the cloud has a central role to play for businesses going global.
Customer expectations	This driver is highly disruptive, and entirely beyond the control of your business. As such, the starting point is to understand how those expectations are changing, and then how to align your actions and programs accordingly. Technology – especially the cloud – has a lot to do with this, but equally important will be adopting a more customer-centric culture that delivers value beyond simply selling your products and services.

The Status Quo – Premise-Based Technology

To whatever extent you have considered the cloud for communications technology, it will be in the context of your current situation. You may be entirely premise-based, or already using a few cloud-based applications. In fact, the latter may be more than you think. Regardless, your thinking about the cloud will be shaped by how you think about what you’re using onsite for collaboration.

Change is never easy, and based on how your premise-based environment is performing, there will be good reasons to keep and/or change the status quo. This section focuses on a premise-based solution as being the present state for most businesses and reviews key reasons for keeping the status quo, along with the realities that follow by doing so.

Table 3 – Drivers for Using Premise-Based Technologies

Driver	Implications
Inertia	The longer a premise-based system is in place, the more comfortable IT becomes, presuming the system is holding up reasonably well. Legacy phone systems were built to last and are a prime example of technology that doesn't need much attention. Given IT's stretched resources, there won't be a compelling reason to migrate to a cloud-based alternative as long as the phone system is functional.
Sunk costs	There are many factors driving inertia, and economics is one of them. However, even when there is a desire for change, the sunk costs related to a premise-based system will often carry more weight. If a capitalized phone system has not been fully amortized, financial considerations may well dictate staying the course, even if cloud-based offerings provide more capabilities for end users. Going forward, as the installed base of premise-based systems ages and gives way to IP-based systems, this driver will become less of a factor holding back cloud adoption.
Control	Many businesses – especially enterprises – prefer owning their network infrastructure, mainly because this model provides IT a high degree of control. This suits the legacy model, where network access was a scarce commodity, and this investment was viewed as a strategic asset to the business. For IT, control means ensuring efficient management of network resources, but it also provides their group a fair degree of power in the organization. In this regard, the appeal to remain premise-based should be self-evident, but as the cloud gains traction, this position will become harder to defend.

Table 4 - Realities for Continuing to use Premise-Based Technologies

Realities and Limitations	Implications
Ongoing costs	While it makes sense to keep using a premise-based system after it's paid for, there will still be ongoing maintenance expenses. As such it will not be cost-free from that point on, which needs to be considered when weighing this against the cloud. Not only that, but as legacy systems become designated end of life by vendors, maintenance contracts will continue to become more expensive.
No innovation	For the same reasons cited above, vendors won't be investing as many R&D resources in premise-based product lines. Unless your premise-based phone system or UC platform is truly meeting your needs, this will become problematic at some point given how the collaboration space keeps evolving. Whether it's for a simple upgrade or adding on new features, this limitation will work against maintaining the status quo, especially when compared to the ongoing innovation the cloud can deliver.
Complex to update or integrate	Where updates are provided for premise-based systems, they will be fairly complex, and perhaps place challenging and unexpected demands on IT. The same applies to supporting new integrations with other platforms or applications. Full-service IT departments may be comfortable here, but those with limited resources will not; this is an area where the cloud will have an inherent appeal.
Losing legacy IT skills	Premise-based systems – especially telephony – become finely-tuned over time, due in no small part to the legacy expertise honed over years or decades by IT. That collective knowledge base has incalculable value for maintaining the status quo, but as the current generation gives way to Millennials, IT's legacy expertise will diminish. Depending on how quickly things change, there's a risk that IT won't be able to properly support premise-based systems past a certain point, a factor which should be considered against the cloud's value proposition.
End user preferences	This is a minor factor, but worth noting in the sense that employees also don't always adapt easily to change. With VoIP, the change is usually transparent, but if there's already a high comfort level using third-party offerings for other collaboration applications - such as Skype, Dropbox or Google Hangouts - that will be another reason to maintain the status quo. Of course, if the cloud-based offering is in fact easier to use or provides a better experience, end user preferences could change quickly. For that reason, this should be considered a minor driver for remaining premise-based.

Cloud Communications – the Alternative to the Status Quo

Overview

The status quo for communications technology – premise-based systems – has been in place for decades, not just because that’s all there was, but also because it performed well. While the latter holds true even in current times, there’s a difference between performing well and meeting today’s needs. With telephony in particular, legacy systems are very well designed for their intended functions, but not much else.

This is why IP has been so disruptive, and when VoIP became commercialized in 1995, the entire telephony landscape was forever changed. VoIP’s impact was gradual, but it was the first step toward cloud communications and an early component in the digital transformation in the workplace. From VoIP’s humble beginnings, there has been a profound evolution in how communications technology empowers worker productivity, with the cloud at the heart of it all.

Before considering the merits of cloud communications, some basic definitions are in order. The common thread for all cloud variations is that the underlying applications are hosted in a remote server environment managed by the provider. While the provider may or may not own the hosting facility, they maintain control over the applications, which are provided on a subscription basis to your business. In the context of this white paper, these offerings would either be VoIP or unified communications (UC) services that are consumed on demand. For the most part, cloud-based VoIP or UC are recent variants of the Software as a Service (SaaS) model, where a business licenses the use of applications rather than owning them outright.

From this basic overview, it should be clear how the cloud fundamentally differs from the premise-based model. A rationale can be made for each, and to sharpen our focus on the cloud, this section addresses the pros and cons, along with prime use cases where cloud is a more effective model.

Table 5 – Pros for Cloud Communications Solutions

Advantages	Rationale
Less complexity for IT	Technology is changing constantly, and much of it is new for IT. Integrating UC with existing systems brings new complexity for IT that they will need to manage in-house. The simplicity offered by cloud solutions may be the best reason of all for IT teams.
OpEx funding model	IT also faces budgeting challenges, and the CapEx model for premise-based communications technology is getting harder to justify. Cloud options aren't capital-intensive, an RFP isn't required, and the ongoing subscription cost is cashflow friendly and easier to budget.
On-trend with XaaS model	With the broader as a Service model gaining acceptance in more industries and applications, many businesses are using cloud services more often than they realize. This is especially prevalent when it comes to adopting the latest technologies.
Flexible deployment options	Regardless of IT's capabilities or attachment to premise-based systems, the cloud's flexibility can support any scenario in terms of being fully or partially hosted. Not only can IT start with hosting at their comfort level, but they can also migrate portions of their business to the cloud at a pace that makes sense for their organization.
Intuitive model for Millennials	Cloud applications are a Millennial's native habitat, and more naturally support mobile and collaborative work styles. This means Millennials will be comfortable with hosted communications from the outset. Similarly, premise-based systems have increasingly less utility for Millennials.
Ease of integration with other applications	Standalone applications have limited value for collaboration and improving workflows. With many cloud platforms being open environments, there are fewer integration challenges, especially when it comes to integrating other cloud-based applications such as CRM or contact center. This will also make it less attractive for employees to seek out third-party applications that bypass IT and undermine the consistent user experience that makes UC so compelling.

Highly adaptable	Another core strength of cloud solutions is the ability to evolve with ease. With technology change being a certain and rapid, the ability for businesses to “future proof” and remain on the leading edge of innovation has great strategic value.
More vendors/solutions to choose from	This may not be evident right away, but the cloud enables a wider range of players to enter the market. With that, businesses will have more solutions to choose from, including those from vendors outside of the traditional telephony space.

Table 6 – Cons for Cloud Communications Solutions

Disadvantages	Rationale
Short history	Cloud-based offerings have been in the market for many years, and while this model is proven, the track record for cloud communications is relatively short, especially for real-time applications like voice. As such, buying criteria related to the longevity of premise-based offerings cannot be applied the same way with comparable cloud alternatives.
Low barriers to entry	While this creates more choice and a more competitive market, it also means companies from outside the communications space can enter. This places more onus on IT to evaluate each vendor’s suitability, along with how well these options can truly match what experienced telephony vendors have a track record of doing.
More expensive over time	Long term, leasing costs more than owning, but options like cloud UC haven’t been deployed long enough to know when that inflection point will be. The OpEx model will likely carry the day for going ahead, but at some point, IT will need to justify the business value of the ongoing costs for a hosted solution.
Wide range of value propositions	While flexibility is a core virtue of the cloud, this also means there’s little standardization across the offerings. This presents another scenario where IT will have to work harder to properly evaluate various solutions, as

	compared to more standardized premise-based offerings.
Not all providers able to support hybrid	Another aspect of flexibility is a vendor’s ability to support the three basic deployment models – cloud, premise-based and a hybrid of the two. Some providers are cloud-only, and if you’re looking for a phased migration to the cloud, you’ll need to carefully consider providers who can truly support all three.
Potential compliance issues	Data sovereignty raises complex issues, and many cloud providers host their data abroad. This provides some economic advantages, but in markets such as finance, healthcare and public sector, there can be compliance issues that will take the cloud option off the table.
Difficult to revert to premise-based	As businesses move away from premise-based legacy systems, IT has less need to support them, and with that, decades-old expertise will dissipate. At a certain point, that loss will be too great for IT to revert to onsite if their cloud deployment fails.

Prime Use Cases for Cloud Communications

Overview

The above analysis of pros and cons isn’t exhaustive, but reflects the key attributes from our industry research. Premise-based deployments remain the status quo for communications applications, but when considering their limitations against what the cloud can provide, the cloud story is quite compelling. Every deployment option has its strengths and weaknesses, but in the broader context of changing technology and evolving work styles, businesses will need to make choices about what strategy best suits their needs going forward.

While the status quo will remain so long as it’s working, when current needs cannot be met, decision-makers must consider all options. IT’s value to the business is no longer based solely on reducing telephony costs.

Today’s value comes from making employees more productive, and making the organization more agile to respond to changing market conditions. This speaks directly to the cloud value proposition, but you need a sharper focus to make a winning case that management will buy into. Technology has the most business value when addressing specific problems, and Table 7 below summarizes the top use cases we see in our research.

Table 7 – Cloud Communications Use Cases

You should use the cloud if...	Rationale
The business is expanding rapidly	This is a scenario where you don't want old technology to be a holdback. Time to market is critical when growing quickly. Compared to premise-based environments, the cloud is far more adaptable, especially for scaling on demand and providing a fully integrated solution from the outset for new end users.
Adding new locations	This applies more to organic growth. With premise-based systems, there is time and expense involved with trunking, connectivity and hardware for each new site. With the cloud, these efforts are centralized, making it easier to add sites without overprovisioning.
Growing on a global basis	Premise-based communications solutions present challenges when expanding globally, especially when dealing with local carriers and vendors for hardware. Being borderless, the cloud does not face these geographic constraints so long as broadband access is reliable in the new regions being added.
Expanding use of remote workers	This is a growing preference for both employers and employees. However, not only is it more difficult for IT teams to manage but many premise-based systems are limited in their ability to extend a full feature set and consistent user experience to remote workers. This is essential for workers to be productive, and hosted UC provides an easier path to support remote scenarios.
Acquiring or merging with other companies	Communications technology is not a key consideration in these scenarios, but when mergers and acquisitions involve multi-vendor systems, there are often major integration challenges. This creates another hindrance to productivity and employee satisfaction, which can be particularly damaging to newly combined organizations. Conversely, a cloud-based communications platform makes it much easier to incorporate new teams and entities, regardless of the systems being used.
Plan is to accelerate innovation	This would be a strategy-based scenario where management wants an innovation-driven culture, which requires leading-edge collaboration technology. Premise-based systems are simply not flexible enough to

	support the degree of data sharing required for teams to work on complex innovation projects.
Want to attract best and brightest workers	Thinking more about the changing workplace, digital natives represent your future, and the best and brightest will often be selective in who they work for. They will be drawn to workplaces with the latest technologies that support their preferred workstyles, which is where cloud-based communications applications will shine.

Strategic Considerations to Support the Business Case

Based on the previous section, it is clear that there are multiple scenarios that lend themselves well to cloud-based communications and could be used to build a business case for transitioning to the cloud. Furthermore, the use cases aren't restricted to being technology updates; the benefits go well beyond IT's realm. Since the business is likely already using other kinds of cloud-based applications, there should be some familiarity with the basic hosted model.

However, while the rationale for cloud communications may be strong, you need a strategic, holistic approach to ensure this is the right path. Here are five considerations that will help make the business case a truly strategic decision.



1 | Assess your collaboration needs first

Migrating from legacy telephony to VoIP is fairly straightforward, but going from there to UC is far more involved. Instead of updating a phone system, UC entails a suite of integrated applications that help employees collaborate more effectively. With today's technologies – especially newer cloud-based applications such as browser-based video, virtual meeting rooms or persistent chat – collaboration has become a more fluid concept, with capabilities that a basic premise-based phone system typically cannot support.

Not only are there more ways to collaborate and more endpoints to collaborate with, but each generation collaborates differently. Furthermore, collaboration isn't just about making communication easier – it's also about managing workflows across disparate environments, and providing a consistent experience wherever workers are located, especially in mobile settings. All of this and more needs to be assessed, not just to determine the right type of collaboration solution, but also where the cloud brings particular value over remaining premise-based.



2 | Consider the implications for IT

Since IT will be driving much of the effort around migration, the full impact of the cloud for IT teams must be considered. If managing telephony and the communications infrastructure has been central to IT's role, much of that will move to the cloud, if not initially, then over time. This will certainly be a good decision if IT is not properly equipped for the demands of today's digital natives. In this regard, a realistic assessment of both what IT is willing *and* able to support is just as important as the cloud solutions being considered.

Not only will collaboration technologies become more complex, but most IT departments will likely face continued constraints on budgets and staffing. With limited resources, IT teams may welcome the cloud as the better and faster way forward. For teams who are often asked to do too much with too few resources, simplifying cloud communications management could also free IT personnel to focus on other projects being demanded by the business.

Additionally, there is a promising opportunity for IT to carve out a new niche in terms of managing the analytics that all these new cloud applications will generate. This is where the strategic value of collaboration technologies will be determined - not just as a means of optimizing network operations, but a way to measure worker performance based on their productivity.



3 | Be strategic – cloud is business decision, not a technology decision

Most IT decisions are based around technology and how well it supports the network. This is especially true for premise-based systems that IT manages and employees use in their jobs. The scenario is different for collaboration solutions. Rather than being a passive utility like telephony, they are highly user-driven, where workers play a central role in deriving the business value. These applications help employees make the entire business more productive, which makes transitioning to the cloud a strategic decision.

While collaboration solutions like cloud UC can make life easier for IT – especially by integrating standalone applications into a common interface – the benefits are business-wide. When workers are more productive, teams are more productive, and when that happens, the business performs at a higher level. By positioning cloud communications as an enabler for business outcomes, IT will have a value proposition that management can buy into.



4 | Understand the changing workplace environment

The true test for adopting the cloud for collaboration will be how well it aligns with these broader trends. Digital natives will be less inclined to use legacy applications such as telephony and email than digital immigrants, and their differing work styles must be accommodated. Younger generations highly value flexibility in the workplace – where they work, how they work and when they work. Being tech-savvy, they also value personalized experiences, which means multimodal communication and the ability to customize how applications are used.

Based on the generational mix of your workforce, you will need technologies that are flexible enough to support a range of preferences. This is where the limitations of premise-based systems will become clear and the cloud is more likely to be the best approach for keeping pace.



5 | Be prepared for managing constant change

The cloud has strategic value because it's highly adaptable to change. Legacy telephony may be your most recent major communications investment, and if so, that's the wrong benchmark to use for collaboration solutions. No technology has remained static for as long as the phone system, but the polar opposite is true for collaboration. Rather than flipping the switch on a new telephony deployment, IT will now need to wear several hats, not only implementing a collaboration solution, but engaging workers to adopt it.

Aside from that, we're still in the early stages of addressing today's collaboration needs and solutions will continue to evolve. Not only will IT need to stay on top of new applications, but as the ecosystem keeps expanding, there will be more technology partners to consider, including both unknown start-ups and major players from spaces adjacent to the communications sphere. This means IT will need to stretch beyond its comfort zone, and to manage that, a cloud-based solution offers natural advantages over remaining premise-based.

Evaluating Cloud Communications Partners

Once strategic business considerations have been addressed, a similar approach is required to choose a cloud communications partner. Unlike premise-based solutions, where the vendor's system resides and is managed onsite, a cloud-based solution will be hosted offsite, meaning you'll need a higher level of trust in that partner to deliver the capabilities you've signed up for. Here are five prime considerations.



1 | Understanding the needs of your business

First and foremost, your vendor partner needs to be more than a cloud services provider. Pure cloud providers tend to be large entities, making them a natural fit for large enterprises that require scale. This fit does not always translate as well for smaller businesses, not just for scale, but also in understanding what is needed to properly support them. Businesses need a partner that natively understands the challenges around collaboration and real-time communications. That pedigree will be harder to find among cloud providers from outside the communications space.



2 | Understanding cloud communications

While there are many vendors with a rich pedigree in telephony or other communications modes, they have varying degrees of cloud-based expertise. When it comes to collaboration, however, this isn't just about scale and cost-efficiency. What's really important is the ability to support real-time communications from the cloud, and enable end users to seamlessly work across various collaboration modes. On an individual level, this means supporting workers across all fixed and mobile endpoints. On a broader level, this means providing carrier-grade uptime, ideally supported by an SLA that ensures business continuity for the entire organization.

Vendor partners must also be able to integrate unified communication solutions with other platforms such as contact center or CRM in a secure, compliance manner. These variables are easier to manage in a premise-based environment, where IT has more control, so when ceding that control to the cloud, you need to know how your vendor partner will address these challenges.



3 | Ability to support all deployment scenarios

Even when the business case for cloud-based collaboration is very strong, businesses aren't always willing or able to make a complete transition from their premise-based system. As such, care must be taken to evaluate how well a partner can support hybrid deployments, and it's important to note that this ability will not be present among pure play cloud providers. These providers may suit newer businesses that have had little exposure to legacy technology, as well as more established businesses that have a high comfort level with the cloud. However, most businesses fall elsewhere along the cloud-premise spectrum, and as such, need a vendor partner who can allow them to migrate to the cloud at a pace they're comfortable with.



4 | Established track record

As noted earlier, communications technologies have only recently been deployed from the cloud, so most providers in this space have a short track record. Within that realm, however, the longest tenure will be found among the vendors with a telephony pedigree. In that regard, these vendors bring the best of both worlds - the proven expertise in real-time communications and the experience of bridging premise-based systems into cloud-based services without compromising performance.

Aside from the technology record, these providers should also be evaluated on their financial track record. The economic viability of pure play cloud providers for collaboration is not yet proven, and larger public cloud providers will only stay in this space if it is profitable. Furthermore, many of the new players must build revenue from the ground up, and while barriers to entry are low, they will be more likely to exit if customer adoption stalls.



5 | Innovation-focused

Last but not least, IT needs a cloud partner that understands the evolving nature of collaboration. In this context, being innovation-focused means covering the full spectrum of applications, including messaging, video, mobility, conferencing, embedding voice into business applications, and automating workflows. Building on basic communications applications, an innovation-focused partner leverages the flexibility of the cloud to layer on new capabilities, such as analytics, chatbots and natural language processing.

These enhancements take collaboration to the next level by adding context to simple communication, or machine learning to automate processes, or predictive analytics to track new metrics for measuring productivity. This won't come from pure play cloud providers, as they are in the business of providing commodity hosting at the lowest possible price, and nor will it come from a vendor still built around premise-based solutions. Finding the right balance here won't be easy, but making this a priority will pay off if you see innovation as a driver for competitive advantage.

The Final Word

The decision to adopt cloud-based solutions for communications and collaboration clearly involves many factors, and this white paper has distilled the essence from extensive industry research. Choosing the right vendor partner is just as important as deciding to move on from premise-based systems. The criteria outlined here provide a solid foundation for making a choice that works on a business level by providing capabilities that make workers productive, as well as works to keep IT teams relevant and valuable as they transition from premise to cloud.

With all that being considered, our view is that ShoreTel comfortably meets the criteria outlined herein, and that their Connect CLOUD offering can address a wide range of use cases for businesses of all sizes. Aside from supporting an end-to-end cloud environment for a wide range of collaboration needs – managed telephony, UC, team collaboration, contact center, mobile integration and custom applications– Connect CLOUD shares a common architecture with Connect ONSITE, ShoreTel’s premise-based platform. As such, they can continue supporting premise-based components for businesses wanting a slower path to the cloud. Furthermore, this common architecture also makes for a consistent user experience across the full range of UC applications, and this is not a given for solutions that have been built from a patchwork of elements and offered as UC.

Every vendor or cloud provider needs to be assessed on its own merits, and you’ll need to determine how well they measure up using a common set of criteria – along with your unique business needs - so you can make a fair evaluation. This white paper serves as a model for such an evaluation, and on that basis, ShoreTel serves as a good standard for the type of partner you should be considering, not just for adopting cloud communications, but also to make collaboration a strategic growth driver for your business.

J Arnold & Associates, an independent technology analyst practice, produced this white paper, which was sponsored by ShoreTel. The contents herein reflect our conclusions drawn from ongoing research about the contact center market, and specific research for this white paper with ShoreTel’s customers and partners. For more information, please contact us by email: jon@jarnoldassociates.com.