Insider’s Guide to Hiring a Cloud Service Provider

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Welcome Letter

Thank you for downloading the Insider’s Guide to Hiring a Cloud Provider. Moving to the cloud can seem daunting, so we created this guide to help you identify the most important decision points along the way. The most critical decision you’ll face is choosing your cloud provider. Partnering with the right provider will position your practice for cloud success.

When implemented correctly, your cloud strategy lays the foundation for a reliable experience, security unparalleled by other solutions and flexibility to customize your environment for your practice’s best interest. All of these benefits ultimately lead to improved patient care – and isn’t that your end goal?

We’ve worked with hundreds of healthcare practices in varying stages of cloud adoption. Some are just starting their journey to the cloud, others are switching cloud providers because they’ve been dissatisfied with their experience while others have experienced the benefits of cloud with some of their applications and now want to move their whole desktop to the cloud. Wherever you are in your cloud journey, I’m certain this guide will help.

As you initiate the cloud evaluation process, this guide will arm you with questions to ask potential cloud providers and answers that should raise a red flag. You’re going to learn what distinguishes a cloud partner from a cloud provider.

I hope you find this guide helpful in your cloud journey and are able to use the information to select a cloud partner that will position your practice for growth and success.

If you have any questions about the guide or the questions within, please don’t hesitate to reach out to Netgain anytime.

Wishing you the best with your cloud strategy,

Kevin Lynch, CEO at Netgain
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Cloud Service Provider Questions

1. What other healthcare organizations do you currently provide cloud services for?

Healthcare organizations have unique needs and compliance requirements, making it important to find a cloud provider with experience helping organizations navigate complex technology challenges and increasing regulations.

2. Do you have experience supporting organizations of my size and specialty?

Knowing how many clients the cloud provider supports is a good way for your practice to gauge their expertise. It’s also helpful to understand the size of practices they serve to assure they are qualified to support an organization of your size and specialty.

You should be thinking about how your IT environment and the support provided will be handled if team members take vacation or sick time, or if the company experiences turnover? The cloud provider’s client care team should be made up of several group members so that you know you will always be covered. Understand the cloud provider’s commitment to staff continuity, and what efforts they make to retain team members.

If you work with a smaller cloud provider, make sure they have partners who specialize in areas in which you may need further assistance. The partner may be able to manage certain aspects of your environment that the smaller cloud provider doesn’t manage.

These questions will help you better understand a cloud provider’s experience with healthcare organizations:

• Does your staff complete annual HIPAA training to stay educated on the latest regulations?
• Do you have a designated security officer or a security team on staff? What type of access do your clients have to them?
• Do you currently host my EHR for any clients?
• What other healthcare applications do you deliver and support?
• What percent of your total clients are healthcare organizations?
• How many Business Associate Agreements (BAA) do you have in place?
Cloud Service Provider Questions

3. How long has your company been providing cloud services?

The rapid adoption of the cloud has resulted in an uptick of technology providers offering varying degrees of cloud services. Take the time to understand how long they have been in existence and specifically how long they have been providing cloud services.

While the cloud may feel new, some providers have been delivering cloud services and management to clients for decades. Experienced cloud providers will have a deeper understanding of the technology required to offer the levels of performance and availability your practice needs.

4. How is your company different than other cloud providers?

Some cloud providers are just a service at the end of the wire while others focus on building a relationship with you, understanding your challenges and achieving your desired outcomes.

Ask the cloud provider what makes them stand out. Are they healthcare focused? Can they host all of your applications, not just your EHR? Will they advise you on what telecom you should use? Do they offer telecom support?

5. How does your security protocol keep our patients’ data secure?

Your cloud partner should provide core security services that include identity-based security and encryption. In the healthcare world, the law requires certain levels of security, so make sure they reach or exceed that level. Like any other vendor, the cloud provider must be included in your vendor management program and risk assessments.

You should be looking for evidence of a strong posture. Items would include a layered defense, security certifications, annual risk assessment and penetration test, dedicated security staff, and compliance with applicable requirements.
Cloud Service Provider Questions

6. Please provide your company’s disaster recovery and business continuity plan.

Discuss how the hosting provider will continue supporting your environment in the event that a natural disaster takes down data center operations. This plan should include backup processes that include daily, weekly, monthly and yearly backups and their corresponding retention policies. Experienced cloud providers even provide continuous snapshots throughout the day at intervals of 15-30 minutes, providing even greater coverage in the event of a disaster. A provider should assist in recovery due to major power outages or natural disasters. Make sure they will help you maintain redundant systems and manage automatic failovers (cutover to a secondary server should the first one fail).

7. How are storage, server or compute resources scaled?

The healthcare landscape changes rapidly, and a cloud provider should have the flexibility to adapt just as quickly. As your practice grows and changes, your storage, server and processor needs will also change. How quickly can your cloud provider accommodate? What are the associated costs? Hosting fees are typically calculated based on number of users and consumption of resources. This monthly fee structure provides budget predictability and stability.

Cloud providers can mitigate this cost and enhance performance by offering tiered storage solutions that archive data based on its recovery and availability needs. Check if your cloud provider offers tiered storage as a way to curb storage costs.

8. How can we minimize disruptions to our practice as our applications are migrated to your platform?

It’s important to know that the transition to a cloud provider will go smoothly. Make sure the cloud provider has experience migrating healthcare organizations and can perform the migration with minimal disruption to your practice. Discuss the migration experience with references, if possible.

A successful migration involves a knowledgeable, experienced cloud provider and a well-prepared practice. When the cloud provider and practice understand the overarching business objectives of the project, they can operate from the same playbook and communicate effectively throughout the process.
Cloud Service Provider Questions

9. What applications are you able to host for our practice?

A typical physician practice may use Microsoft as their cloud provider for Office 365, use their EHR software provider for their EHR, use a private cloud provider for their practice management and their PACS storage on-site. These solutions all have separate logins, support contacts and service level agreements. Practices are quickly overwhelmed with point-solutions that offer separate support and service level agreements to manage.

Ask the cloud provider if they are able to cover all aspects of the cloud like software, storage, network and support. Unifying your desktop under a single cloud provider will allow your practice to experience the heightened benefits of a fully-integrated, cohesive cloud solution.

Most common tools in the cloud¹

| PATIENT ENGAGEMENT/EMPOWERMENT TOOLS | 35.2% |
| HEALTH INFORMATION EXCHANGE | 34.3% |
| BACK OFFICE SOLUTIONS (OFFICE 365, EMAIL) | 18.1% |
| BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND DISASTER RECOVERY (BCDR) FUNCTIONS | 13.3% |


10. How do you calculate your fees? What costs are outside the scope of your cloud services?

Costs are calculated differently for cloud providers, but it’s important to understand how you will be charged. Is it based on number of users, applications, storage or server resources?

You will also want to understand what costs fall outside of the scope of your cloud services so you can budget accordingly. Some providers consider events like emergency support, software upgrades or local network support as out-of-scope while other providers provide these services within their cloud offering.
Cloud Service Provider Questions

11. Describe your company’s approach to support. Will we have a dedicated support team that is familiar with our applications and environment?

Healthcare organizations need quick, easy access to support when issues arise. Your cloud provider should keep your users productive and focused on their primary duty of serving patients. Support hours and levels of service should be outlined in the SLA so you understand what’s in-scope.

It’s ideal for your cloud provider to offer a dedicated support team for your organization. This may mean that there are focused support teams dedicated to specific clients based on what EHR they use and their sub-specialty. Dedicated support teams allow your practice to experience more personal connections with the support staff, more specialized service and shorter wait times.

Ask the cloud provider how they collect customer feedback and what the results are. A reputable cloud provider should have the results to share.

12. Do you have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) designed to meet the rigorous needs of healthcare practices?

Data availability is vital to the healthcare practices. A hosting provider’s Service Level Agreement (SLA) should detail the organization’s availability standards, response times and support services. What is the average response time? Is any financial credit offered if availability drops below the threshold outlined? When are the provider’s maintenance windows and can these be customized for my practice? Be sure to carefully read the SLA and ask questions in any areas needing additional clarification.

Negotiating an SLA is possible with the right cloud provider and should be one of the first terms discussed during your cloud evaluation process. Small details in your SLA can mean a better experience for your users, more value for your practice’s budget and a cloud environment that is customized for your practice’s unique needs.
Cloud Service Provider Questions

13. Will our data be stored in a private cloud environment? Do you use any public cloud partners to deliver your cloud services?

Take the time to understand where your data will be stored – a private or public cloud.

The public cloud shares infrastructure resources across many types of clients, industries and workloads. Some cloud providers partner with hyper-scale clouds like Amazon Web Services or Azure. If the provider uses the public cloud, ask questions about the public services to determine what would be covered under the Business Associates Agreement (BAA) and assess the vulnerability of your data.

14. What kind of user training or orientation do you provide post-migration?

Once your environment has migrated, users need to understand how to access the applications they use. Ask the cloud provider what training will be provided and what training is out of scope.

15. Can you provide references of 2-3 practices of similar size or specialty to my practice?

Speaking with references is the most effective way to understand how the cloud provider is performing. Are they keeping the other organization’s data secure? Are they providing the support they expected? Do they have knowledgeable staff? References offer valuable, candid feedback.

If there is a specific application—like your EHR—that you plan to host with the cloud provider, ask to speak to references running the same application.
Red Flags

1. They ask you to sign a long-term contract without termination for convenience.

A reputable cloud provider should include a reasonable exit clause, sometimes called “termination for convenience.” This clause stipulates that your practice can terminate the contract at any time for any reason, if you are unsatisfied.

2. They have limited or no experience working with healthcare practices.

Healthcare organizations have unique needs and require specialized support and services. Cloud providers that haven't worked in healthcare likely do not have experience working with your applications, such as your EHR. They have experience supporting customers but may not understand the urgent response times needed by practices. They also may not sign Business Associate Agreements (BAA).

3. They are a young company.

A new cloud provider may be able to meet all your needs, but without having a background in hosting for organizations similar to yours, it’s best to proceed with caution. It becomes even more important for you to understand how many team members the organization is made up of, how they manage their infrastructure, what support is provided, etc. Small, start-up cloud providers present risk in employee turnover, company instability and inexperience.

4. They don’t have references similar to your practice.

References are extremely valuable when choosing a cloud provider. They give you a good look at what it will be like to be a client of the provider. If the cloud provider has any hesitation in providing client references or testimonials, you may need to reconsider.

5. They don’t ask about your desired business outcomes.

Cloud providers should be focusing on what you want to get out of your IT infrastructure, ultimately asking what your desirable business outcomes are. Your cloud experience will be most successful when you and your service partner understand the overarching goals of the practice.
About Netgain

At Netgain, we believe there is a “better way” to deliver IT and we closely partner with healthcare organizations to help navigate complex technology challenges and increasing regulations. From designing the solution around your desired outcomes to implementing and maintaining it to your complete satisfaction, we have the people with experience that can take care of it all.

While helping hundreds of clients reach their IT goals, Netgain has gained a high degree of competency in healthcare IT.

Netgain offers tailored IT solutions to help your practice GAIN:

- More Resources to Redirect Toward GROWTH
- White-Glove Service and Support
- Reliability and Security
- Flexibility to Scale
- Secure Mobility
- FULL Compliance
- Stabilized and Reduced Costs
- Peace of Mind

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