

Google makes cloud storage cheaper for consumers

Google announced earlier this week it's dropping the price of extra storage for users of its Picasa photo editing service and Gmail. These services are free, but Google for the past two years has charged users who want additional storage to hold their photos and messages; as of this week the company will offer twice as much storage for a quarter of the old price, putting 20GB of space at \$5 a year. That's enough to store 10,000 full-resolution photos, Google says.

In addition to the fact that it costs next to nothing, the advantages of storing personal data in the cloud are that users can access it from any computer or device and easily share it with friends or family, says Google. This is great. But consumers should be just as cautious about what they put in the cloud as corporations because regardless of what kind of data is being stored there, the risks are the same.

Industry analysts appear to agree that the two biggest concerns regarding cloud computing are the availability and security of the data that's stored there. Major outages of cloud-computing services that have made headlines in the past few months speak to the fact that availability concerns are real. Okay, so consumers wouldn't lose access to mission-critical data the way companies would, but a person who suddenly can't view the hundreds of photographs she's stored on Picasa is still frustrated. As for security, consumers should be just as concerned as any corporation with the privacy of their data stored in the cloud, especially if it's at all sensitive or can lead to identifying an individual, as most personal data is.

Cloud computing is one answer to the problem consumers experience when trying to store and manage the endless amounts of data that is accumulated these days. But just as corporations are advised, consumers too should step carefully into the cloud.