



Web-based Applications vs. Client-Server Software

Just as there are “two kinds of ‘everything’ in the world”, we now have two kinds of software: Web-based and Client-Server. The new kid on the block, Web-based (AKA “Hosted”), typically resides externally on an Applications Service Provider’s (ASP) network, while Client-Server Software (AKA “In-House”) is run internally on your own computer network. As with any comparisons, there are Pros and Cons with each option. Here are just a few for your consideration.

System Costs

Pros

- **Web-based** – System is typically offered on a subscription or usage basis, keeping you in control of the costs and allowing you to grow into the system without a huge up-front expense.
- **Client-Server** – You are in control of upgrades and can cut ties with the software provider if you don’t care to have the newer features or support.

Cons

- **Web-based** – Subscriptions tend to be ongoing so that over extended years, the system can appear to cost more than an in-house application (though a true cost comparison would have to include many other factors).
- **Client-Server** – Software is usually paid for up-front and the initial cost of the system can be high. You have high exposure if the system doesn’t turn out to meet your needs. Also, licensing may require a service contract of as much as 20% of the system cost per year, whether you use it or not.

Environment

Pros

- **Web-based** – Hardware, operating system and database software are included in the price of the application. There is no internal cost to your company to purchase, maintain or upgrade the network.
- **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. While databases are separate and secure, system load can be a factor.
- **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. Pushing off to an ASP can actually save money.

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. Issues with upgrades are typically dealt with globally, not on a customer-by-customer basis.
- **Client-Server** – System upgrades, user seat software and database migrations happen when you choose, not on the ASP’s schedule.

Cons

- **Web-based** – You do not have a say in the management of the network and can be subject to the availability of the ASP's network administrators.
- **Client-Server** – You bear all the expense of upgrades, and software vendor can push as many new revisions at you as they choose. Issues with upgrades are difficult as the vendor must typically address them remotely and your unique network configuration can pose unforeseen problems that are not quickly rectified.

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.
- **Client-Server** – Applications tend to run faster when they are local to the user's computer.

Cons

- **Web-based** – Remote software requires access to the Internet so users cannot typically make database changes when off-line. Data also has further to travel which can create slower screen response.
- **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. Buying seats for customers or vendors (and providing them remote access) is most likely cost-prohibitive.

System Access

Pros

- **Web-based** – Software is accessed from anywhere with a standard browser and an Internet connection. The user does not even have to be using his or her own computer. Most companies have reasonable Internet access so no additional costs should be incurred.
- **Client-Server** – Software is accessible through the local network, creating reasonably quick response and autonomy from the Internet.

Cons

- **Web-based** – Access requires an Internet connection. While access to the Internet is growing, it's still not everywhere.
- **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 which can be expensive and increase your IT overhead.

While other factors will also come into play, these comparisons should increase your awareness of the differences between the types of applications and help you make your next software purchase a more educated one.

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