# The Beginner's Guide to Microsoft Azure

**Microsoft Azure**

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## Introduction

Moving your servers, storage, networking, and software to the cloud is becoming an important strategic move for businesses. Instead of storing files on a hard drive, they're being stored online. Applications are run in the cloud for better performance and easier disaster recovery. Cloud computing supports the needs of today's mobile, on-the-go, and often remote workforce, as well as the demand for scalable digital customer experiences.

Cloud computing platforms like Azure offer organizations a way to upgrade their IT capabilities and prioritize performance while reducing costs. With affordable monthly and annual subscriptions and the ability to pay only for what you use, it's easy to scale Azure's cloud computing solutions up or down to meet your company's evolving needs. Making the move to the cloud is a big step—and it's important to choose a provider that offers the features, migrations, operational support, and security features needed.

Here's a closer look at what the Microsoft Azure platform offers and how it can help your business achieve its most important goals in the year ahead.

## What Is Microsoft Azure?

Azure is an ever-expanding set of cloud computing solutions offered by Microsoft that help organizations meet their cloud computing goals. Azure offers IT teams the freedom to build, manage, and deploy applications on a large global network using their preferred tools.

Businesses use Microsoft Azure to:

- **Access applications and data securely from anywhere:** Microsoft Azure allows your team to develop, deploy, and maintain applications online and store data for easy, secure retrieval from any connected device.

- **Control costs:** The demand for IT teams to get more done—with smaller budgets and lower headcount—continues to increase. Cloud solutions like Microsoft Azure let you skip the capital expenditures for buying hardware, eliminate ongoing management expenses, and pay an affordable monthly subscription where you pay for what you use.

- **Scale up or down on demand:** Azure is designed to be flexible, which means you won't be paying for capacity you don't need. Pay only for what you use. Take advantage of the flexibility to scale back during lower demand seasons or rapidly scale up capacity to take advantage of a new business opportunity.

- **Take disaster recovery and backup to the next level:** FEMA estimates that 90% of small businesses that don't get back online within 5 days of a disaster close within a year. Even a minor outage can put you at a competitive disadvantage. With Azure, ensure your apps work when you need them the most—without the expense of secondary infrastructure. Azure customers can take advantage of a range of backup and disaster recovery options.

- **Keep security front and center:** With greater cybersecurity threats than ever before, it's critical that any move to the cloud considers the impact on security and compliance. Today, Microsoft Azure has more than 90 compliance certifications—including regional privacy issues and industry certifications such as SOX and PRI. That's more than any other cloud provider.  The platform's end-to-end security tools—including identity management, network security, secure storage, and AI-driven threat detection and mitigation—keep your most valuable data safe and protected.

> "At this point, cloud adoption is mainstream. The expectations of the outcomes associated with cloud investments therefore are also higher. Adoption of next-generation solutions are almost always 'cloud-enhanced' solutions, meaning they build on the strengths of a cloud platform to deliver digital business capabilities."
>
> Sid Nag, Research Vice President, Gartner

- **Transition to the cloud, at your speed:** Microsoft Azure makes it easy to transition to the cloud, at the speed of your business. Take a tiered approach to adopting cloud computing. Start with a trial project, migrate selected priority workflows like HR and finance to the cloud, or move all your applications to the cloud for a complete digital transformation.

- **Lay the foundation for future technology development:** Continuous innovation from Microsoft supports your development today—and your product visions for tomorrow. Build on the latest advancements in the cloud, including more than 1,000 new capabilities released in the last year.

## Key Features of Microsoft Azure: How It Helps Your Business Grow

Embracing the benefits of cloud computing is an important step for business and IT leaders. And understanding the features and the full scope of services that can benefit your business can help not only ensure you're choosing the right plan—but ensure that your underlying configuration meets your needs.

Azure includes many "as a service" components, including:

- Platform (PaaS)

- Infrastructure (IaaS)

- Software (SaaS)

- Disaster Recovery (DRaaS)

Some of the core features and functionality organizations can leverage include:

- **Easily creating virtual machines:** Easily create virtual machines to run key workloads, provide failsafe options for critical applications, and more. Azure lets you create virtual machines in either Linux or Windows environments.

- **Support remote work with Windows Virtual Desktop:** Deliver a virtual desktop experience and remote apps to any device. Bring together Microsoft 365 and Azure to provide users a full Windows 10 experience.

- **Use App Service to deploy applications:** Azure App Service enables you to build and host Web apps, mobile back ends, and RESTful APIs in the programming language of your choice—without managing infrastructure.

- **Azure Backup:** Automate your backups and protect against the threat of ransomware with backups across your infrastructure.

- **Storage:** Tap into a wide range of cloud-based storage options, from affordable archive storage options for rarely used data to scalable, secure Data Lake features for Blob unstructured data storage.

- **Application Insights:** Gain full visibility into your applications, infrastructure, and network at all times.

- **DevOps tools:** Leverage a wide array of DevOps tools that can help your developers share code, rapidly test, and deploy applications in secure, high performance environments.

- **Cognitive services:** Build intelligent and supported algorithms into apps, websites, and bots to see, hear, speak, understand, and interpret your user needs.

While this is just a partial list of some of the powerful features in Microsoft Azure, it underscores the wide range of available tools and services that can unlock the potential of your IT operations. Whether you're building a bridge between cloud and server or moving to a fully cloud-based set of solutions, Microsoft Azure can be configured and deployed to help you reach your objectives.

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## A Closer Look at Security

Often, decision makers are persuaded by the benefits of cloud computing: the lower costs, reduced IT workforce demands, and greater flexibility and agility. The ability to tap into cutting-edge tools and scale them across the digital environment is a major selling point.

But a critical question remains: What about security?

Microsoft Azure has been designed with industry-leading security solutions. The company's massive investments of more than $1 billion annually and a dedicated team of 3,500 cybersecurity experts have given them a unique market advantage. They're committed to keeping customer information secure at all costs. Some points to note include:

- **90+ compliance certifications:** Compliance is a major strategic concern that can quickly become a headache. Microsoft Azure has more than 90 compliance certifications, covering 50+ regional certifications and 35+ industry certifications. From data privacy to financial and healthcare compliance, Azure offers the industry's best solutions. They've even developed Compliance Blueprints, to help you develop architecture and settings that get you into compliance with specific regulatory guidelines, ensuring configurations match specifications and more.

- **Azure Security Benchmarks:** The Azure security team recently released the Azure Security Benchmark V1, a collection of 90+ best practices for security and compliance. The Benchmarks outline how to use tools and settings to implement best practices for everything from network security to conducting penetration testing.

- **Centralized identity management:** Use Active Directory to centralize identity management across your digital ecosystem. Easily enable multifactor authentication, control information access, and add layers of security for who can view or edit your most sensitive data.

- **Real-time monitoring:** Microsoft Azure offers real-time threat monitoring and mitigation, using AI to constantly combat cybersecurity threats with an increasingly sophisticated and responsive multilayered protocol.

- **Azure Security Center:** With Azure Security Center, access real-time security assessment, actionable recommendations, and insights about your applications and infrastructure. Use a range of tools to improve your security posture and defend against security risks.

- **Data security:** Azure provides industry-leading solutions to protect your data security and privacy, from end-to-end encryption for data in transit and at rest. In addition, privacy controls let you decide who can access what data, how it's stored, and the protections put in place.

Microsoft Azure is also compatible with third-party security solutions that can build on their robust native security capabilities and let you fortify your infrastructure and operations to any standards needed to support your compliance, security, and privacy objectives.

## What to Consider During a Migration to Microsoft Azure

Making the move to a cloud computing platform can be complex—but you don't have to go it alone. Microsoft Azure recommends that companies follow a systematic process to understand their needs, document desired outcomes, and design a solution that will deliver the best results possible.

Often, organizations can choose to work with cloud solutions providers (CSPs) like Connection, which build on decades of collective experience working with thousands of Azure clients to assess your unique needs. Some factors to keep in mind when working through a migration can be guided by Microsoft's Cloud Adoption Framework. They recommend:

- **Define your strategy and assess your needs:** Begin the project by conducting a full readiness assessment. What's the business justification for the move to cloud computing? Define this in terms of specific problems you're trying to solve—including the impact they're having on your business—or highlight business outcomes you're hoping to achieve. Understanding your motives and pain points, and defining what success looks like, will help align your Microsoft Azure deployment with your larger goals.

- **Plan next steps based on a detailed analysis:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the organization's current technologies and workflows. Are there legacy systems that will be incorporated? Will you begin with one or two selected priority projects, or plan a full migration? Understand the skills that your current IT team brings, and whether you will rely on outside partnerships to help with management, migration, and other key aspects of your Azure deployment. From there, it's possible to outline and understand which Azure tools and services are the best fit for your needs.

- **Develop a cloud migration map:** Developing an assessment and related action steps can result in a data-back roadmap that outlines your path to adopting the cloud. Your migration roadmap should not only encompass immediate actions, but should help you navigate specific offerings, such as resource sizing, standard pricing, hybrid-use-benefits, reserved instance detail, and best practice incentive stacking.

- **Execute the migration:** Once you've outlined the goals and prepared the cloud environment for migration, the actual modernization of workflows can occur. This process can be supported by a cloud services provider to mitigate downtime and support a seamless migration.

- **Plan governance and management:** Once your Azure solution is in place, it's important to have a plan to manage ongoing maintenance and update governance of data and settings. A managed services partner can help keep your setup current—minimizing the time your IT team needs to spend on this task, while ensuring that you're maximizing the return on investment, security, and performance of your system.

You don't have to navigate this process alone. Increasingly, small and medium-size businesses are working with cloud solutions providers. CSPs can not only help you determine which features and level of service is right for you, but a solutions provider like Connection can ensure you're getting the best pricing, services, and ongoing support to get the most out of your IT investments.

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## Get Started with Microsoft Azure

Microsoft Azure offers the cost-effective, agile, and secure cloud computing solutions you need to upgrade your IT infrastructure. It's never been easier to get started. Contact Connection today to learn more about how we can help support your migration, provide access to ongoing promotions, and more. **Connection is offering a special promotion for a limited time that includes migration support, a $1,000 Azure Credit, and a one-month no obligation managed services free trial, and more. Learn more and contact us today** to start your assessment and to discuss how Microsoft Azure can meet your cloud computing needs.

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