Digital Empowerment

cepheo

Outsourcing success – all the way from goal to operation

Get a baseline to assess the value and risks of outsourcing IT operations in small and medium-sized businesses.





Outsourcing success – all the way from goal to operation

Clarification and preparation

The operational phase

Conclusion

| Foreword | 2 |
|---|----|
| What are the benefits of outsourcing operations? | 3 |
| What is your IT starting point? | 5 |
| What is your objective? | 7 |
| Who should be involved in the process? | 8 |
| Laying the foundations for successful IT operations | 9 |
| What are my needs? | 10 |
| Find the right partner | 11 |
| Working with the IT outsourcing partner | |
| Smooth process from quote to contract | 12 |
| Start the set-up phase in small steps | 16 |

19

20

Foreword

If you are an IT manager in a small or medium-sized business, this guide is designed to help you decide whether your company should outsource some or all of its IT operations.

The guide is based on Cepheo's more than 30 years of experience in developing and implementing IT solutions as well as designing and operating infrastructure. During that time, we have worked with thousands of businesses of all sizes across Scandinavia. Such experience means we are well equipped to assess when and in which situations it makes the most sense to outsource IT operations.

Along the way, you will gain insights into how to:

- Plan the outsourcing process depending on your specific starting point
- · Identify objectives and assess value, need and maturity
- Create a plan for the process
- Determine who needs to be involved in the organization – and when
- Ensure the successful operation of IT
- Determine what type of partner is right for you

We also equip you to take the next step, from negotiating a satisfactory contract with the right IT partner to establishing a scalable and stable operation.



CHAPTER 1 What are the benefits of outsourcing operations?

Depending on your business goals and needs, it may be relevant to outsource part or all of your company's IT operations. If in doubt, it is a good idea to start small and initially transfer a small amount to test it out. Then you can always add or adjust afterwards.

Of course, there are advantages to keeping operational responsibility in-house. Primarily, this means that you retain control and responsibility for all the details, and the infrastructure is managed and maintained by your own employees who know your business needs and culture.

Should you outsource or not? Is IT outsourcing beneficial to your business? Outsourcing requires thought, methodology and management support - but the potential rewards are huge.

Often, however, your business can gain even more benefits by outsourcing IT operations to some extent:

- You can free up resources and concentrate on your core business
- You experience more controlled and stable IT operations and simplified IT administration
- You get access to strong IT skills and an expert IT environment
- You can continuously scale the IT platform as the business evolves
- You do not need to invest in new hardware to stay up to date with technological developments

- Your business is less exposed to risks such as dependency on key employees
- You get easier access to increased information security in compliance with data protection regulations (GDPR)
- You can optimize liquidity and cash flow and plan for fixed IT operational costs
- You can streamline operations and maintenance
- You can optimize "time to market".

The more of your IT operations you outsource, the more of the above benefits your business can enjoy.

Your actual benefits of outsourcing depend on the IT platform you are currently using (read more about this in chapter 2) and your short- and long-term goals for your IT platform (read more about this in chapter 3).







CHAPTER 2 What is your IT starting point?

The right platform, for the right application, at the right time.

Maybe you already have applications that can utilize cloud technology with the ability to scale up and down quickly. Or you have critical systems that still rely on local or hosted hardware to function optimally. In any case, your business probably needs a mix – and you get that with a hybrid platform.

Cloud technology lets you move fast when business demands it, while dedicated hardware can provide higher performance and perhaps the easy customization that your industry requires.

A hybrid IT infrastructure means you avoid expensive hardware investments that you do not need, while avoiding large extra bills from cloud solutions that should never have been deployed. The right combination of platforms saves you money, allows you to transform IT at the same pace as the business and to act before the competition does.

But no matter what type of solution you are considering, you should know how your company currently handles IT operations to be able to choose the mix that best suits your organization.

5. Full outsourcing

Full outsourcing, where the IT partner takes care of all practical issues so the company can concentrate on its business.

4. Controlled

Controlled approach with frequent, scheduled maintenance based on a clearly defined goal.

3. Proactive

Proactive approach where the organization has an overview of systems and processes and a plan for how to handle planned and unplanned incidents.

2. Reactive

Reactive approach: Change and troubleshoot when customers or employees point out an issue.

1. Ad hoc

Ad hoc modification and troubleshooting.

You can place different degrees of IT management on a scale ranging from the least developed to the most developed plan, as the illustration on the previous page shows. At one end of the spectrum are companies with an ad hoc approach to IT operations, where changes and troubleshooting are done when time allows. Other companies respond when customers or employees point out the need. Still others take a more proactive and controlled approach with scheduled updates and maintenance.

At the other end of the scale are companies that have outsourced all IT operations to one or more external IT partners and spend virtually no time worrying about IT operations. Determine where your company's IT operations plan falls on the scale.

Once you have ranked your business among these ways of managing IT operations, you can determine whether your company's approach to IT operations now fits your business needs.

If you are unsure which of the above examples describes your company's approach to IT operations, the following examples might help you clarify. These are all signs that your business has challenges that could be addressed by increasing maturity and/or handing over responsibility to an external partner:

- Frequent system crashes
- Long waiting times for return to normal after a crash
- Inefficiencies due to IT issues
- Support tasks are dragging on
- Many unplanned IT tasks
- Unhappy IT users

In general, the greater the mismatch between your current operational situation and your expectations of how things should run, you can expect to reap greater benefits from outsourcing.

Frequent crashes, numerous unplanned IT tasks and growing employee dissatisfaction with systems are classic signs that you need to rethink your operations.





CHAPTER 3 What is your objective?

Defining a concrete goal for outsourcing IT solutions to a strategic partner or moving them to the cloud is just as important as actually doing it.

IT outsourcing, in isolation, does not create results. You can only achieve them through strategy, planning and preparation. In short, your goals and ambitions determine how much you get out of moving all or part of your operations to the cloud or to an IT or hosting partner.

Whether it is as part of your digital business development and with a well-formulated business management strategy – or whether you want to take advantage of the scalability and robustness of the cloud alone.

If you have decided that outsourcing is the way forward for your business, the next step is to formulate the purpose of taking the step. A clearly formulated objective is your guideline when deciding on need, value and maturity in relation to price.

Therefore, you should asses value, needs, and your own and your potential IT partner's maturity as part of your goal clarification. Can outsourcing add financial value to your business, improve workflows and processes, optimize productivity, increase security – or maybe several of these elements at the same time?

The answer to that question can influence which activities, solutions or platforms you choose to outsource – and to what extent you choose to do so.

On a more concrete level, you can start by identifying your business needs by answering the following questions:

- Do systems and processes such as ERP, CRM or collaboration and knowledge sharing need an upgrade?
- Are your employees' collaboration processes simple, logical and optimal, and are their work tools effective?
- If you had to start over, would you change roles or functions?
- Does your business require tailored solutions or can you settle for more standardized solutions?
- Are you adequately protected against IT crashes, hacker attacks or other security breaches that could damage your company's finances and reputation?

Clear answers to these questions will help formulate a plan for your company's outsourcing needs and goals.

See chapter 9 for which solutions may be relevant depending on your answers to the above questions.



CHAPTER 4

Who should be involved in the process?

The more thoroughly you have considered how, how much and when to outsource, the greater the chance of success. Even if later – and maybe even several times – you recognize that the plan needs to be revised.

Once you have formulated an initial outsourcing plan, get it ratified by the board and management. This will help ensure a common understanding of the background for the upcoming process and anchor the decision at top-management level, which is extremely useful.

You will probably find yourself revising the plan – and estimating needs and maturity, for example – in collaboration with the IT partner(s) you choose to work with. But the more thoroughly you have considered needs, opportunities and goals before you get started, the more likely it is that your efforts will ultimately be prioritized for the greatest value and chance of success.

Once the objective and plan are agreed with the board and management, they must be formulated to ensure they are understandable to IT users, who should be informed when the goal and direction are clear from management. Later, during the set-up and operational phases, IT users can be involved to provide input on which systems and processes need to be dusted off or adjusted. IT users can also be involved even at this stage to classify your company's use of data and applications.

Alternatively, this can wait until you have chosen an IT partner so that this process can be done in collaboration with them. Based on the classification and the needs stated in your company's objective and plan, the IT partner will assess which skills, processes, technologies and agreements are needed to support the objective and implement the plan.

Ratify your objectives and outsourcing plan with the board and management.



CHAPTER 5

Laying the foundation for successful IT operations

In addition to the objective and classification of data and applications, the foundation of successful IT operations consists of a number of factors, each of which is equally important for success:

- User and IT-partner skills
- Business and IT partner processes and agreements
- Technology

Therefore, these elements must be considered in the setup and IT operations plan.

It can be difficult for a small IT department to muster the necessary collection of skills needed to tackle the wide range of challenges it must be able to handle.

IT is not just about running and patching systems – it is also about licenses, hardware, applications and legal details around data protection, security and rights. Then there is change management and contingency planning, for example.

Small and medium-sized businesses with small IT departments often spend disproportionate amounts of money investing in and implementing platforms, processes and technologies. So, it often pays to outsource management of e.g., service desk and systems for monitoring and troubleshooting IT systems. The same applies to hardware such as backup power systems, redundancy of servers and networks to handle back up or replication. When you outsource IT tasks, you free up resources that can be used much more effectively to develop your core business.

Once you have clarified your objective and needs in terms of skills, processes and technology, you can also better determine what and how much you need to outsource and what type of partner you should look for.

You can also read more about this in chapter 9.

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CHAPTER 6 What are my needs?

The more realistic you are about your company's actual needs and expectations regarding the scope of your outsourcing project, the easier it will be to choose the right outsourcing partner.

When determining your company's need for IT services, you can refer to the three types of outsourcing that this service is typically divided into, from a small solution to medium to comprehensive solutions:

- Data center hosting
- Data center and application hosting
- Data center, application hosting and infrastructure management

If you choose a basic data center solution, the IT partner should offer a firewall and network operation of the data center, back-up and hardware monitoring. If you are looking for a more comprehensive solution with both data center and application services, look for an IT partner that also handles server monitoring, operational support, data center security solutions and standard solutions and applications such as email, ERP and SharePoint.

If you want to concentrate on your core business and outsource all IT operations to an external IT partner, you should choose an IT partner who – in addition to the above – also handles licenses, operates local networks and understands how to connect your company's core competencies and processes with your IT needs. It is usually beneficial to outsource major tasks such as infrastructure, i.e., servers, networks, storage and important applications like ERP. If you also have more specific needs, Cepheo recommends that you consolidate everything with a single medium or large IT partner or continue to handle the specific solution internally in your company.

As well as looking at what services potential IT partners offer – such as accessibility and security – you should also look at the size of the IT company: A very small IT company often does not have sufficient capacity and maturity to meet your needs. But with some large partners, smaller customers may feel overlooked.

Think about whether you are going for a small solution with pure hosting, a medium-sized solution or a comprehensive solution.





CHAPTER 7 Find the right partner

An outsourcing relationship is a close and business-critical collaboration that can extend many years into the future. But even the most exhaustive contract cannot fix bad chemistry or challenging relationships. Consistency and "good chemistry" between your own company and your future outsourcing partner are, therefore, crucial. Otherwise, collaboration can easily become cumbersome, unnecessarily burdensome or even more costly than expected.

Once you have decided what type of IT partner to engage with, you can narrow the field further by searching for information on those that meet your criteria – including their core competencies, financial stability and history. It is also wise to find out – through networking, references and direct contact, for example – how other companies of your size experience working with the partners you are looking at. Then invite the potential candidates for an initial interview. The purpose of this meeting is to clarify:

- Whether the chemistry works between you and the potential IT provider
- Whether the candidate understands your business and its needs
- The candidate's process maturity
- The candidate's approach to the task
- Whether the partner has sufficient experience and is financially stable

You can read more about choosing a partner and how to terminate a partnership in chapter 8.

Now that you have determined the status of your current IT operations, how you want them to work and why, you probably have a clearer picture of what type of solution and potential IT partner to go for and how to prepare for the next step – negotiating a deal.

In the next chapters of this guide, you will get tips on what potential IT partners' offers and subsequent contracts should include and how to approach the set-up phase and operations.

CHAPTER 8 Smooth process from quote to contract

A quote from an outsourcing partner should not only include a draft description of the agreement your company will enter into with them – including service level agreements (or SLAs). It should also make it easy for you to see the real cost when and if you need to scale up or down in the future.

After you have assessed and met with your prospective IT partners, it is a good idea to select the 2-3 most promising ones and ask them to prepare a quote for the job. The more targeted and relevant information you provide IT partners, the more qualified quotes you can expect to receive.

What should the best quote include?

It should, of course, describe the content and scope of the proposed technical solution.

Equally important is a specification of each of the agreed services and the service targets – Service Level Agreements or SLAs – you have agreed on.

Common service metrics are monthly server uptime, response time and response time to support requests, etc. Each service should be presented with its own financials to help you understand the value of each element and compare it to what your business gets out of each service.

It should also include a price list for all the relevant services the IT partner can offer. This allows you to calculate the cost level if you later need to expand or slim down the agreement. The quote – and the contract it may lead to – should be designed to allow you to scale individual IT services up and down according to your business needs.

It should be clearly stated in the agreement you enter into with the IT vendor that the agreement contains two separate phases, namely a set-up phase and an operational phase. Because while it is easy to adjust elements in the set-up phase, it is much more difficult to change the agreement for the operational phase.

In this phase, you should also clarify the division of roles between your company and your IT supplier and establish milestones for what the IT partner should deliver, and when. Get it in writing first in a quote and then in a contract with the IT partner that you can hold them to during the set-up and operational phases.

While it is easy to adjust elements in the set-up phase, it is much more difficult to change the agreement for the operational phase. During the initial collaboration process, pay attention to whether the collaboration with the outsourcing partner is working well and whether you feel your business is in safe hands. However, if there are elements of the relationship that you are decidedly unhappy with – and that are not corrected quickly when you bring it to the partner's attention – it is a good time to break it off and find another partner.

Classify your data and applications

Once you have decided which quote you want to accept, you need to classify your data and applications if you have not already done so (see also chapter 4). This can be done in collaboration with the IT partner.

Classification helps the partner put together the solution design on which the agreement between your company and the IT partner will be based. The better the rating, the less risk that a future IT outage will cost you hours of downtime and critical data loss. For the same reason, the IT partner also needs to know how your current IT solution works.

The combination of your objective description and classified data and applications will enable the IT partner to determine how to supply your needs in terms of meeting your goals and expectations, and to plan how to roll out the set-up phase.

Assess the collaboration in the quotation phase

As we all know, thorough preparation always pays off. So use the set-up phase to ensure you get the solution that matches your needs and strategy – and that you sign up with the right partner.

The initial collaborative process of translating your business needs into your IT needs is also your chance to assess whether the IT provider is right for you and your business. If the collaboration is already not working optimally at this stage, both parties are best served by stopping amicably before signing a contract.

What the contract should contain

Once you have accepted a quote, you can start working with your chosen IT partner to draw up a contract. Some start from scratch and draw up a contract without reference to the quote selected. In other cases, the quote is integrated into a contract. If the quote is part of the contract, it must be clear whether the contract or the quote legally carries more weight.

The contract describes the technical solution as well as each of the agreed services and the service goals you and the IT partner have agreed on. But it should also include timelines, milestones, roles and other practical details for the set-up and operational phases. This includes service windows that define how often, how long and at what time of day/week IT systems can be maintained and thus be potentially unavailable to your employees and customers.

Furthermore, your company is responsible for the security of your business data. The contract must therefore include a data processing agreement with the IT provider stating who is responsible for what and in which situations.

If the quote is part of the contract, it must be clear whether the contract or the quote legally carries more weight. If the IT partner no longer meets your IT needs, it should be easy for you to get out of the agreement and switch to another partner.

Your payment terms must be clear

Include in the contract how, when and how often you must pay the IT partner: In advance or in arrears? In any case, paying monthly is the easiest way to ensure you only pay for what you get. Especially if you have adjusted details in the contract or created new users. The invoice should also specify what you are paying for, so you can see in detail what the different items include, such as licenses, hardware, software and services.

To facilitate a smooth and clear transition from setup to operation, you may want to include in the contract that your company pays monthly invoices for operation as soon as both parties agree that the set-up phase has been completed as agreed.

Consider conditions for contract termination

If you decide in the future that your IT partner is no longer the right fit for your IT needs, it is important that it is easy for you to get out of the agreement and switch to another supplier. Therefore, make sure that the commitment period for the set-up project is clearly stated in the contract. Depending on whether your business pays for all or part of the set-up costs, the contract should also include the option of exiting the operating agreement if the agreement is not fulfilled.

If the IT partner has paid for some of the set-up phase, Cepheo recommends that you commit in the contract to pay compensation if you want to terminate the contract after the first 12 months. For example, payments can be gradually decreased the longer it takes for you to terminate the contract.

You should also ensure you can access detailed information about the IT solution, processes, data storage, etc., at the end of the contract or when changing partners.

What about the employees affected?

Outsourcing will, by definition, free up resources within your company when the partner takes over operations, support or other tasks. It has an impact on your IT organization, and you have probably already had some thoughts in that direction. It is certainly an issue that employees are aware of.

So if you have not already made a decision, you should now work towards deciding what role the affected people in the IT organization will play in the future.

Basically, there are two options. Either the person or persons concerned: or or Take on other tasks within the company - for example,

Inform employees as early as possible and implement reasonable severance processes if necessary.

business development,

strategy, etc.

In some cases, it may be relevant to involve your partner in your considerations. Especially if, for example, your future partner may be interested in taking on your employees.

However, if you find yourself in a situation where there are no roles for them in either your company or the partner's company, you risk them leaving in the middle of the project, which can delay or make the process more costly.

It may, therefore, make sense to offer the affected employee(s) a bonus for staying until the task is completed.

In any case, it is crucial to inform employees – both those directly affected and those not – as early as possible. And of course, to plan and execute any retirements in a timely and orderly manner to minimize the impact on the organization.

Some outsourcing processes provide new tasks for the affected employees either at your own company or at the outsourcing partner, but others do not. Such considerations should be made as early as possible, and be built into your plans and make sure you announce them. Employees will certainly have their own concerns, so if you do not inform them in a timely manner, you risk the project being delayed or made more expensive because key skills leave the company in the middle of a critical phase.





CHAPTER 9

Start the set-up phase in small steps

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is important that the contract states what needs to be completed by when in the set-up phase. Both in terms of the technical solution, services and service goals. If this is not clearly stated in the contract, you run the risk of the IT partner switching from completing the set-up process to focusing on operations as soon as the original schedule dictates and monthly billing begins – regardless of whether set-up is complete or not.

Start small - and take one step at a time

If you have chosen a set-up phase that involves either upgrading or improving, it is a good idea to start small and transition a single system to see if it causes any problems. Once you have ensured that the move goes smoothly, you can move on to upgrading other systems and solutions. Only when it is running smoothly, should you look at what improvements you want.

A gradual transition makes it easier to find any errors and assign responsibility for them.

The setup project itself can be divided into four different types:

- Moving infrastructure as is to new hardware or cloud with the new provider
- User interface and user experience upgrade
- Improvement: New solution with new technology to which existing data and users are migrated
- Outsourcing specific tasks and processes, such as user support, maintenance, monitoring or updates, to existing cloud services.

The price and content of different types of set-up packages vary greatly, so make sure that it is clear which type of set-up your quotes include.



Because the content and price of the different types of set-up packages vary so much, making it clear which type of installation is included in the quotes you obtain is important.



If you simply choose to move your data center to the IT partner, you will continue to experience any errors and inconsistencies in software and integrations that existed before you moved it. However, if the hardware platform of your new IT partner is better than what you had before the move, your IT users will experience a performance improvement, meaning they will find that systems and applications work faster than before the switch.



But if you choose to upgrade with new technology, it will often provide the opportunity to fix bugs and inadequacies in existing software. If you are looking to improve your IT infrastructure, you will be transitioning to getting new, optimized solutions in terms of hardware, software and integrations. The last type is the most complex and time-consuming for your business and the IT partner.



For example, if your company has a very detailed and customized system, it may be relevant to replace it with a simpler solution in the cloud. Partly to reduce complexity and because you will save time and resources on updating more complicated systems.



If you plan to outsource the day-to-day operation and support of existing cloud applications to a partner, make sure a detailed SLA is in place to define support levels, response times and responsibilities. By starting with outsourcing the operation of a limited number of cloud applications, you can evaluate the quality and stability of partner services before adding more complex and mission-critical applications.

Make a test transfer

A good starting point is to test outsourcing on a proof-of-concept (POC) project. A good example of a POC project is the migration of a relatively simple application or function that on the one hand is not business-critical, but on the other hand represents a targeted process. For example, it can be a self-service function in which employees can report vacations, etc.

Choose a POC that can be tested relatively quickly to determine how fast it is to use, how easily it can be scaled and whether there is sufficient structure around data protection, security or other issues of importance. Adjust - together with the service provider if necessary. The experience from a POC will give you important information on how best to move large and more important applications to the cloud. If the POC project is not satisfactory, drop it and re-evaluate strategy, vendor selection and resource usage.

A gradual move makes it easier to find any errors and assign responsibility for them

Move one type of information at a time

Your company should take a step-by-step approach and move one type of information at a time, and – again – preferably information that is not critical to the day-today running of the business, such as HR and employee benefits. In this way, it is easy to find and correct any errors to ensure minimal impact on the company's daily operations.

Another type of information that usually benefits from moving to the cloud relatively early in the process is financial information. At the other end of the spectrum is software that controls your production or other business-critical processes – perhaps even around the clock.

Many cloud-based ERP and CRM systems allow for a gradual migration, so you can move inventory, production or sales incrementally as it suits your business best.

Once your ERP and CRM systems have moved to the cloud, you can supplement them with other cloud-based solutions, such as productivity software. In this way, your users can enjoy functionality in depth and breadth.

Adjust the agreement as needed

With a phased roll-out of outsourced platforms and managed cloud services, it is easier to find any errors, set or adjust milestones and follow up with the IT partner. Depending on your priority, you can, for example, measure the success of your outsourcing by examining whether processes and applications have become faster and easier to use, if daily operations and periodic updates of cloud applications are running smoothly, and if your users are satisfied with the level of support they receive from your outsourcing partner



When it comes to outsourcing, it is always wise to dip your toe in the water and start by moving a visible – but relatively uncomplicated and non-essential – part of the infrastructure to the cloud or hosting partner before moving large and business-critical elements. This proof-of-concept gives you important insights into functionality, response time, scaling, bug fixing, security and other elements of importance for future sub-projects.

CHAPTER 10 The operational phase

Arrange regular status meetings with the operators, e.g. in connection with the IT partner's reports to you on the status of the agreed service targets.

Once the set-up phase is over, you will start working with the IT partner's operations team, who may not have been involved in your case before now. The IT partner's employees who worked on your case during the set-up phase probably handed over information about the case to the operations people. If this is not the case, you increase the likelihood of a satisfactory experience for your own users and the IT partner's operations team by providing them with the information they need about the previous experience and your business needs and goals.

Therefore, it is also a good idea to arrange regular status meetings with the operations team, preferably in connection with the IT partner reporting to you on the status of the agreed service goals.

Contact persons

If your company has entered into a wide-ranging outsourcing agreement, the IT partner will probably appoint one of their employees as Service Delivery Manager for your company.

This is someone who plays a key role in the future collaboration and who is particularly familiar with your company's business and IT needs.

During a transition phase, it can also be a good idea to have an IT supporter from the partner physically present in your company. When your users know who to contact if they need support – and that this person is easy to get in touch with – it reduces the risk of employee dissatisfaction in the transition phase. If you want to make sure that outsourcing meets the expectations of your IT users, consider measuring their satisfaction by conducting a user survey.

"We have had the same contacts and Service Delivery Manager at Cepheo for many years and it works well. I would never run a large IT project without a support agreement".

Hans Spett, IT and Logistics
Manager, Comfort-kedjan AB





Conclusion

Your business type and size can influence whether outsourcing all or part of your IT operations is beneficial for you.

First and foremost, be clear about your company's needs and objectives for any outsourcing and ensure that the board and management agree on the needs and objectives. Your needs and goals will help you narrow down the field of potential IT partners for your outsourcing. Check references and meet with potential IT partners.

The more structured information you provide to bidders, the better the quotes and contracts you can expect to get.

Remember to consider data security and that you also want to be able to scale and get out of a contract without problems.

Once the contract is in place, take a step-by-step approach to make it easier to spot errors and adjust your approach.

Your business needs may change along the way, so it is important to be able to adjust and scale the agreement or even get out of it completely. Cepheo has helped thousands of companies across the Nordics achieve their business goals through digital transformation over the past many years – and we are happy to discuss how your business can move forward.

Whether you ultimately choose to outsource the operation of all or part of your IT infrastructure, and whether you prefer working with a hosting partner or moving your solutions into the cloud.

Contact us if you want to talk to a professional about how outsourcing your IT applications and infrastructure can be beneficial to your business.

Read more on cepheo.com

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