UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Review - OwnCloud

Summary

OwnCloud is an in-house based solution for data synchronization, file sharing and cloud storage. It provides a simple way to set up a Dropbox-like cloud storage system while protecting and managing sensitive data by storing it on-site. OwnCloud can also be integrated with existing security and rights-management protocols and it can extend its functions through APIs to meet specific service requirements.

It is a growing tool in the education market providing similar Dropbox functions to end users while allowing the institution to retain the data stored on-premise.

From an IT Innovation perspective, it may be something to consider in the future as an alternative to the recent investment in ApssSense/Data Now.

Description

OwnCloud has a community version and an enterprise version. The community version is completely free, albeit with very limited support. The enterprise version includes more features and tools and it has also complete technical support.

Enterprise Version Features

- Protect and Manage - host sensitive data on premise or in the Cloud: it can be installed on the server in the data centre or in the cloud, use the organisation's current storage or add more storage; it has native at-rest encryption and antivirus scanning when uploading files.
- Integrate - use existing infrastructure, policies and procedures: It integrates with existing home directories, backup solutions, transparently log access, administrative actions, file sharing and transferring. It also supports external storage such as FTP, external WebDAV servers, etc.
- Extend - open platform to meet unique business needs: Public API enable adding functions to meet special business needs; Use WebDAV industry standard protocol to access files; Brand OwnCloud as part of the organisation's service.

Server Architecture

The most important part of the OwnCloud solution is the server. At the core of the server is a PHP web application running on a webserver (Apache or IIS) and a database. The database support Oracle, MySQL, SQL Server, Postgres and SQLite. A built-in storage abstraction layer makes it possible to access many different type of storage.

Client Applications

OwnCloud can be accessed through a web URL or through desktop sync clients. The desktop sync clients support Windows, Mac and Linux, which will sync files on the OwnCloud server the same as on the user's computer. OwnCloud has mobile apps too, and they are available on Android, iPhone and iPad. Although the mobile apps are not free (cost is $0.99 per license), they do provide a great convenience to allow the user to access the files from anywhere and at any time.

Implementation Requirements

OwnCloud community version is totally free. To set up a community version, just need a web host that supports PHP5 and MySQL, OwnCloud server, and a url for remote access. There are lots of options to install OwnCloud, but the easiest one is to use the web installer. A database will need to be created manually if there are multiple users. Once OwnCloud is installed on the web server, the desktop sync software can be set up on the client computer.

Enterprise OwnCloud offers Proof-of-Concept package, which includes three months subscription and 5 days of remote consulting. In production, OwnCloud is most often deployed as an n-tier load balanced web application running in an on-site data centre.

User License Agreement and Cost

For non-education organisations, OwnCloud Enterprise Edition starts at 15 USD per month with a minimum of 50 users = 9,000 USD per year. However, OwnCloud provides huge discount for Education organisations. OwnCloud Enterprise Edition is about 36,500 EUR per year for 6000 users with the Education discount. This comes to about 6 EURO per year per user.

Conclusions

- OwnCloud's main benefit is that it allows the institution to host the data on- premise while it provides Dropbox-like functions to end users.
- OwnCloud has other features not supported in Dropbox such as file versioning, which allows users to undelete and track changes made to the files or an app store.
- From an IT Innovation perspective, OwnCloud may be something to consider in the future as an alternative to the recent ITinvestment in ApssSense/Data Now.