

The cloud levels the playing field in today's fast-changing economic environment. Increasingly small- and medium-sized businesses are turning to the technology and may even be taking the lead in [cloud computing](#) adoption.

And the technology is becoming easier to adopt and more useful out of the box. More services are being layered on, from [mobile](#) to social media. And new options for signing up for the cloud are emerging. All of which means that small- and medium-sized companies (SMBs) can spend less time and resources managing technology and more time growing their businesses.

As a hub of data and applications, it's a powerful strategic resource. Because work can be accessed anytime, anywhere, on all kinds of devices, the cloud can improve collaboration inside a business. With more people working outside of the office at least part of the time, the cloud is a way to let them tap into data and web services when it suits them. Of the more than 200 cloud decision makers that [IBM's Center for Applied Technology and Oxford Economics](#) recently surveyed, more than 60% of small- and medium-sized businesses have adopted cloud computing, and more than half will be increasing their investments over the next two years.

And by layering on [analytics](#), a company can get a better understanding of which products and services are selling, what kind of marketing is working, and which employees are the most productive. Forty percent of small- and medium-sized companies are improving market responsiveness and rapid business innovation to a high

degree using cloud.

For example, [Meritage Homes](#), a real-estate developer in the southern and western United States, was looking to improve the home buying experience. The company realized that its sales data was in systems throughout the company, which meant that employees were spending hours manually typing in data, taking time away from the home buyer and slowing down the process. Meritage turned to the cloud to pull together every piece of sales data, from the first contact with a potential buyer to the post sales period, helping speed up the process for individual homeowners and giving Meritage a real understanding of how different marketing campaigns work and how its sales team is performing.

With technology becoming one of the main drivers of change in business, the cloud provides a potent advantage. Its flexibility and accessibility to employees and even customers makes it the natural foundation for the integration of mobile, social media, and analytics.

And that's what more small and medium sized businesses are aiming for. According to a recent [IBM survey of more than 300 midmarket C-suite business executives](#), 65% recognize that the lack of a cohesive social media plan is the biggest barrier to doing more in the digital space.

Midmarket CMOs, in particular, want to pull together the components of a strong digital strategy, including integrating various channels more tightly, increasing the use of analytics to understand customers, and rolling out social networks to increase collaboration with customers.

CIOs, in the meantime, want to digitize their companies' front offices over the next few years as part of a bigger effort to focus more on the customer experience. Since customers' lives are driven so much by technology, it makes sense that the interaction with, and understanding of them, should be as well.

The payoff of fusing analytics, mobile and cloud is clear. According to our survey of midmarket executives, the businesses that are weaving these technologies together are 26% more likely to outperform their rivals. No matter the size, the cloud can pack a punch.