As I sit at my desk, admiring the cloud, I am full of questions for the coming year. No, I am not talking about a visible mass of condensed water vapor floating in the atmosphere, I am talking about cloud computing! You've heard about it; everyone says you need it, but what the heck is it? Basically, cloud computing helps you dump the software. But still, what does that mean to your business? Few things tie up a business owner’s time and money as much as technology does. Computers, software apps, networks and other devices that your business relies on are often complex, expensive and time-consuming to purchase and maintain. These challenges are driving more entrepreneurs to adopt cloud-based solutions. Here are the four main reasons you should consider making the move to the cloud:

1. It is cost efficient. Because you don’t have to purchase additional hardware and software, you’ll save on capital expenses. By moving some of your infrastructure to the cloud, you won’t need to have IT staff or devote hours of your own time to IT maintenance.

2. You can access your data from anywhere. Cloud-based storage and apps live on remote servers and are web-based. This means that you and your employees can access them from anywhere, on any device, with a browser and an internet connection.

3. Your data is automatically backed up. How many of your businesses were down for days, weeks or even longer after the tornado of 2011? Most business owners understand the importance of backing up essential data, and yet it’s probably still one of the first tasks to fall by the wayside. Having your data automatically backed up through a cloud provider gives you one less daily worry, and it ensures that your files are protected in the event your business suffers a power outage (or a tornado!).

4. It makes collaboration easy. Cloud services have made document sharing, real-time editing and other forms of collaboration a cinch. Because most of the apps are browser-based, you and your employees don’t have to waste time learning different interfaces, waiting for email attachments to download, or translating documents from one format to another.

Technology is helping every business, large and small, to move forward. Because of new technologies like cloud computing, entrepreneurs can build companies at a fraction of the cost as compared to earlier years. Despite the difficult economy—and in many ways because of it—entrepreneurship is alive and well. Whether you are on Main Street or on the web, the forecast looks bright for 2014. Use the resources of the CoC. We are here to help.

—from Small Businesses

Chamber to host “State of the Community” on January 16

On behalf of the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce’s Governmental Affairs Committee, we would like to invite you to attend a panel presentation on the “State of the Community” sponsored by Freedom Insurance - Gloria Williams Agency on January 16. The event will be held at the TP Country Club from 5:30 PM to 8:00 PM.

Mayors from each of the 11 municipalities of Cullman County have been invited to speak.

BAILEYTON
COLONY
CULLMAN
DOODGE CITY
FAIRVIEW
GARDEN CITY
GOOD HOPE
HANCEVILLE
HOLLY POND
SOUTH VINEMONT
WEST POINT

The purpose of this forum is to provide the county and each of the municipalities in Cullman County the opportunity to share information on their community with Chamber members and the business community.

Thank you also to our program sponsor Premier Bank of the South.
Chamber helped to celebrate growth in the Cullman area

Shimmer & Glo Tanning and Beauty Salon
216 2nd Avenue SE, Cullman

Serra Visser Nissan
1724 Cherokee Avenue SW, Cullman

Deep South Classics
118 5th Street SE, Cullman

Nominate your favorite small business today

The Retail Committee of the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce is proud to provide special recognition to our small business community by presenting one (1) monthly recognition award and one (1) yearly recognition award to be presented at the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting held each February. Visit CullmanChamber.org to show some love to your favorite business.

Karen Sladick is a premier expert in productivity and leadership training. For over 7 years, her training sessions and keynote speeches have helped professional leaders, teams and organizations improve output, increase speed in execution and save time at work. She educates, entertains and motivates professionals to improve workplace productivity. Get what you need to begin an organized year in 2014. Be sure to take advantage of this seminar sponsored by Charter Business at the Chamber on January 30 from 8:00am to 12:00pm. Cost for Members is $129 per person (Future Members - $159). To register online visit www.cullmanchamber.org under the events calendar. Please contact Jackie Moore at 256-255-0723 or jmoore@cullmanchamber.org for more information.

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The convenience of cellphones has made it possible to talk to others anytime and anywhere, but there is still an art to using the phone properly in a professional setting. We will cover what to know about speakerphone, ring tones, greetings, speaking volume, voicemails and more. In addition, the session will cover suggested phrasing for professional phone etiquette in an office environment to create a good image when answering, handling complaints, transferring calls or away from the office. These simple tips are easy to immediately implement in any organization!

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