



By Ch'ng Chin Chin

FEATURE

# THE INTERNET'S CLOUD-Y FUTURE



@Rocshot, TEDxTallaght

The Internet Revolution is still waiting for its next giant step. Innovator Gary Thompson tells us that separating data from identity allows for a jump in accessibility and function.

There comes a point in life when you finally have enough pieces of the puzzle to see the bigger picture. For Gary Thompson, this happened in 2009 when his wife, Maureen, had a recurrence of breast cancer. He had to drive her down to MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston from Austin, Texas with a CD of her diagnosis on their dashboard. It was during the three-hour drive when it occurred to him that had the connections been better, the speed at which Maureen could have been put in contact with the

right life-saving therapies would have been quicker.

He also realised that the skills he already had up to that point could contribute towards a solution to this problem. Armed with a combined 25 years of experience in Apple, the e-Government Task Force of Texas and online fundraising tool, Kimbia, Thompson had the knowhow, friends and colleagues to merge innovative culture and fundraising awareness with connections made across a lifetime of

personal and work experiences. He had just the right profile to create what could possibly be the future of the Internet.

Thompson is the CEO and co-founder of the Consortium for Local Ownership and Use of Data (CLOUD, Inc). When *Penang Monthly* grabbed the opportunity to speak to him after his talk at TEDxWeldQuay in October, Thompson said that he believed the best way to fix “broken” connections was to have the Internet start with people.

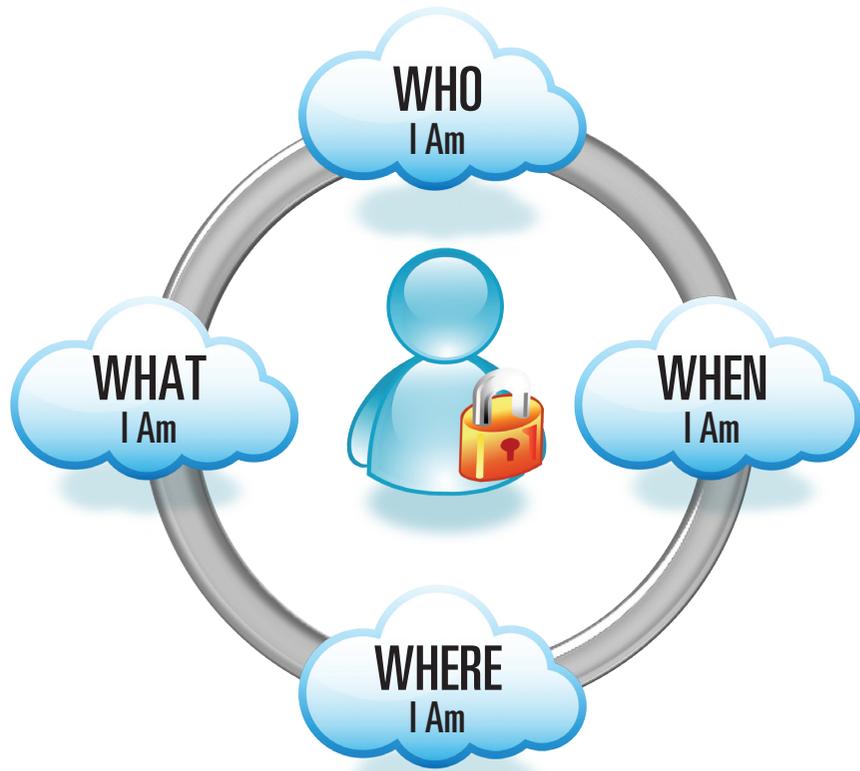
CLOUD wants to change the way information is put on the Internet, thus changing the way we look for a cure for cancer, for example.

Because of how CLOUD works, it can also be applied across any field, from education to finance and beyond. According to Thompson, it is fundamentally different from the cloud we know in cloud-sharing – his CLOUD is all about ME 1.0, a concept which focuses on individuals and their information rather than on entities or web services that need the information.

Thus, the Internet begins with you; web pages wrap around you, and not the other way round.

He thinks we are still not using the Internet to its full potential. For example, on the Internet, we can exist in multiple locales at the same time and therefore the idea of a “destination” should disappear. However, to access data, we still have to go to a website. If we want to check our friends’ profiles, we go to Facebook, where their information is stored in its servers. In a way, we are merely substituting a physical destination with a virtual one.

Thompson’s method of connecting and protecting information or data is not to centralise, that is, to keep it all in one place and to build a moat around it, but instead to decentralise it. With CLOUD, the walls separating the data are broken down and we do not need to go to a virtual destination to access them. Imagine droplets of information in space that are not fenced in on any webpage. You and I are connected to these droplets through what CLOUD calls our WHO, WHAT, WHEN and WHERE I AM™



Adapted from artwork by Josh Kimmell and CLOUD, Inc.

tags. Because it is always connected to us – much like our identity – we don’t have to re-enter it every time we use a new web service, update it for the services we already use or visit a specific webpage to see the data we have entered. To do this, CLOUD uses a Contextual Markup Language (CTML), which is currently in the midst of being written and which will allow specific pieces of information to be tagged to an individual or a combination of individuals. These individuals will have full control of how much and what information gets accessed or shared.

But here comes the unavoidable question of privacy: what if I do not want to be found? Easy. The first step a CLOUD-

enabled world takes is to separate identity from data. The problem we face today is that wherever our data exists, we also exist, thus creating the privacy issue. In a CLOUD-enabled world, data does not

need to be moved. It can stay where it is and interact with other data of its kind and also with its owner’s identity located elsewhere. And because you can untether your data from your identity, your data is anonymous.

What ultimately made Thompson realise that CLOUD is the future of the Internet was the late Kethan Kumar,

an 11-year-old boy with cancer whom he regarded as a special friend and little brother. “Knowing that the boy would go through the same pain (that Maureen

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Art by Kethan Kumar.



did) bugged me,” he explains. Kethan finally succumbed to the side effects of leukaemia in July after over a seven-year battle.

In a CLOUD-enabled world, Kethan would have been connected to all his medical information no matter where he was. If Kethan fitted the criteria for a new cancer drug in a clinical trial, the investigator would have been able to find him simply by pulling up an anonymous set of target criteria, thus locating the right patients. The speed at which we do things will be faster; the drug company will get a return on investments earlier and patients will obtain better drugs at lower prices sooner. “The investigator can quickly target without having to ask, ‘Have I got everything I need in my database?’” says Thompson.

Although the technology is too late to do Kethan any good, it has not stopped Thompson from doing a TEDx world tour in tribute to the boy.

Just to compare, the way we currently look for patients for a clinical trial is to recruit different health centres and have them scan through their databases for the right patients. This process of identifying each centre to go through their records takes time, longer still if the records are not kept electronically. Worse, some targeted patients may slip through the cracks and potentially miss out on the chance to participate entirely.

With CLOUD, Kethan, the little boy who discovered his talent for art during his relapse, would have been tagged to his identities and leukaemia with WHAT tags, which contain information such as “WHAT is my birth date” and “WHAT is my gender”. This, along with everything that he has experienced (WHO, WHERE and WHEN tags), form his “WHO I Am™” tag cloud. The investigator would be able to search for the leukaemia

criteria but would not be able to see the identities tagged to it unless the owners allowed it, thus protecting the patient’s privacy.

Although the technology is too late to do Kethan any good, it has not stopped Thompson from doing a TEDx world tour in tribute to the boy. Starting in Malaysia, where Kethan’s family is from, Thompson continued on to Rome and Dublin, his affection for the boy visible during his talk.

It might take two more years for CLOUD to become reality, but Thompson and Kethan are already linked by their connections and shared experiences. 

**More information on this technology can be found at [www.cloudinc.org](http://www.cloudinc.org).**

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