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Databases in the Cloud

We're used to e-mail in the cloud (Gmail, Office 365), documents and spreadsheets in the cloud (Google Docs, Google Sheets), presentations in the cloud (Slideshare, Prezi, Google again), photos in the cloud... so while fewer people manage databases in their daily work than other types of data, there is clearly a need for database management systems in the cloud.

In specific domains, such as customer data, we have SaaS (software as a service) applications like Salesforce or Zoho. But there are not many generic, PaaS (platform as a service) solutions, especially at low cost. Usually, one has to choose both a database engine *and* an IaaS service like Amazon EC2 or Microsoft Azure, then do the same amount of configuration work that would be required with an on-premises installation. What freelancers, non-profits and small companies need is to rent access to the entire solution, with a low price per user and super-simple web interfaces for database design, management, data entry, query and reporting, without having to worry about the infrastructure provider.

An early offering, not surprisingly, was database.com from Salesforce, starting at $10 per user per month. MongoDB also offers a cloud version, MongoDB Atlas. Other companies that claim to offer database solutions in the cloud often have a specific application model in mind (Zoho, Kintone, etc.) and a higher price. A new entrant in the "really generic database as a service" market is Airtable, which has the look-and-feel of... what we often wish Excel would look like! Airtable is free for up to 1200 records and limited functionality, then goes up to $10 or $20 per user per month for more powerful uses.

Programming Language Popularity Contest

IEEE Spectrum has published a ranking of the 10 most popular programming languages of 2017. The list, in decreasing order, is: Python, C, Java, C++, C#, R, JavaScript, PHP, Go and Swift. The question is, of course, is who was asked and what are their criteria? Python is elegant and simple, therefore may be a favorite of educators as well as amateur programmers. But if we were to judge by the number of lines of code in existence in enterprise and industrial systems, it surely would not be in first place. Or, as one of the people who commented on the rankings wrote: *"Sorry, does someone outside of academia use Python? Or are we ranking this based on how often students Google search on the language their professor told them to use?"*

Prepare for September

September is always a fairly heavy "back to class" month for everyone, but it seems particularly filled with events this year. Here are some of the ones we will attend, lead, speak at, or simply track -- so feel free to ask us if you are interested in any of them:

- the conference of the Latin America chapter of the Project Management Institute in Bogotá, Sep. 7-8;
- the quarterly meeting of the members of the Industrial Internet Consortium in Singapore, Sep. 11-14 -- followed by a public information full day on Sep. 15;
- the IoT in Oil & Gas Conference in Houston, Sep. 13-14;
- the quarterly meeting of the Object Management Group in New Orleans, Sep. 25-29, including a half-day tutorial on Data Residency (Sep. 26 morning) and a half-day session on IIoT Standards in Oil & Gas (Sep. 27 afternoon).

→ 50th Anniversary of the ACM Turing Award

The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) held a sold-out conference in June in San Francisco to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its prestigious award, named after British mathematician, computer science precursor, cryptographer and WW2 hero Alan Turing. Fortunately, the talks have been recorded and are available online for free.

These are gems of reflection and wisdom about the history of computing. The series includes two talks and seven panels:

- Barbara Liskov discussed the impact of the 50 award recipients in their fields.
- Donald Knuth discusses the nature of computer science as a discipline, calling it "a major body of accumulated knowledge."
- The panel topics are:
  - Advances in Deep Neural Networks
  - Restoring Personal Privacy without Compromising National Security
  - Preserving our Past for the Future
  - Moore's Law is Really Dead: What's Next?
  - Challenges in Ethics and Computing
  - Quantum Computing: Far Away? Around the Corner? Or Both at the Same Time?
  - Augmented Reality: From Gaming to Cognitive Aids and Beyond

→ Seen Recently...

"In the age of smartphones, it's worth asking: What happens to our creativity if we never get bored?"

-- Manoush Zomorodi, in her TED Talk