
How to assure that cloud services are secure

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Cloud services, the new way of outsourcing applications, resources and services. The advantages are many but it also means hosting private assets outside the local servers and the question is; how do the so called Cloud Service Providers assure customers that they can be trusted?

Many assessment schemes to choose from

An upcoming trend in the current IT-landscape is to outsource services to so called Cloud Service Providers (CSPs). However, many companies are still sceptical to this kind of services, since they bring about a certain loss of control. For this reason, it is important for CSPs to show that their services are secure. There are several options in proving this and it is up to every CSP to choose which of those options, in this article referred to as assessment schemes, that suits them best. The question is, how do they make this choice?

After an extensive information search, it could be concluded that there are over 20 different certifications, standards, attestations, ratings, assessments, reports, compliances or audits, offering ways to assure security in the cloud. Further, much of the information found turned out to be questionable or straight out incorrect. These facts create a problem

for CSPs in terms that it becomes close to impossible to pick a suitable assessment scheme. At least without investing in expensive consultancy.

Aids in selecting a suitable assessment scheme

To help CSPs in their journey towards an official security recognition, three aids were created. First of all, an overview including a short explanation of relevant assessment schemes on the market. Second, a comparison of assessment schemes in terms of risk mitigation. Third, a casestudy on an actual CSP, called Ferranti Computer Systems, which shows one way of selecting a suitable assessment scheme.

A filtering process

In the casestudy a filtering technique, in several steps, was used. An illustration can be seen in Figure 1. First there was the full list of assessment schemes assembled in the cloud assessment schemes overview. Based on interviews with employees on Ferranti Computer Systems and judgement of what kind of assessment scheme they needed, a first filtering was made. The original list was reduced to a list of seven assessment schemes, which was considered in the next step of the process. Another comparison was made to see how known or recognized the remaining assessment



Figure 1: *Filtering process to select suitable assessment scheme*

schemes were. This comparison was combined with the risk mitigation comparison and the assessment schemes that scored best in this combined comparison were selected as top three. For each of the top 3 assessment schemes a SWOT analysis was created and presented to Ferranti Computer Systems. By assessing those SWOTs representatives from Ferranti Computer Systems made the final choice of moving further with CSA STAR Certification.

Surprising result

Almost no one at Ferranti Computer Systems had heard about the CSA STAR Certification before and most of them were convinced that the ISO 27001 Certification would be the best alternative. The research opened their eyes to other options and made them change their mind. This shows that you should not always go for the usual suspect or most known option. Further, it demonstrates that with the described aids, CSPs can understand the world of assessment schemes, without necessarily investing in consultancy.