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Survey: Data security concerns soar as more CPA firms access cloud

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Concerns about data security are surging as the percentage of CPA firms tapping cloud computing continues to increase, according to a survey from CPA2Biz, the AICPA's for-profit technology subsidiary.

CPA2Biz's second annual cloud survey found that nearly half of the CPA firms polled said that they are using business-grade cloud technology to some degree, up from 44% last year.

The biggest change in the survey results came in the firms' focus on data security. Almost 43% of the firms polled said that they are "somewhat confident" or "not confident at all"—the two lowest categories—in cloud vendors' ability to manage data breaches and maintain effective internal controls. That's up from 15% last year.

"These results underscore what we've preached for some time," Erik Asgeirsson, president and CEO of CPA2Biz, said in a news release. "Web-based services are here to stay. But firms need to do their homework, put in place well-defined service agreements, and choose vendors who have a demonstrated commitment to ongoing technology assurance services."

Information security continues to be the main barrier to entry for firms and clients considering whether to try cloud-based business services, the survey found. Client acceptance is the No. 2 barrier.

Among the survey's other results:

- Nearly a third of survey respondents said their firms are pursuing specialization in an industry or other niche as a business strategy.
- The vast majority of CPAs continue to say that they have a role to play in their clients' adoption of technology.

The CPA2Biz survey, conducted online from Sept. 30 to Nov. 5, polled 312 CPAs from a mix of small to large public accounting firms. The results were released Wednesday at the 2013 Digital CPA Conference, hosted by CPA2Biz and the AICPA.

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