

To enable .NET developers to extend their applications into the cloud, Microsoft has created a set of .NET services, which it now refers to as the Windows Azure Platform.

Azure includes:

1. Azure AppFabric: A virtualization service. That creates an application hosting environment.
2. Storage: A high capacity non-relational storage facility.
3. Compute: A set of virtual machine instances.
4. SQL Azure Database: A cloud-enabled version of SQL Server.
5. Dallas: A database marketplace based on SQL Azure Database code.
6. Dynamic CRM: An xRM (Anything Relations Management) service based on Microsoft Dynamics.
7. SharePoint Services: A document and collaboration service based on SharePoint.
8. Windows Live Services: A collection of services that runs on Windows Live, which can be used in applications that run in the Azure cloud.

Windows Azure Platform can be viewed in a sense as the next Microsoft operating system, the first one that is a cloud OS.

Azure is Microsoft's Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) Web hosting service and Platform as a Service both.

An application on Azure architecture can run locally, run in the cloud, or some combination of both.

Applications on Azure can be run as applications, as background processes or services, or as both.

Six main elements are part of Windows Azure:

1. Application: This is the runtime of the application that is running in the cloud.
2. Compute: This is the load-balanced Windows server computation and policy engine that allows you to create and manage virtual machines that serve either in a Web role and a Worker role.
3. Storage: This is a non-relational storage system for large-scale storage.
4. Fabric: This is the Windows Azure Hypervisor, which is a version of Hyper-V that runs on Windows Server 2008.
5. Config: This is a management service.
6. Virtual machines: These are instances of Windows that run the applications and services that are part of a particular deployment.