Serverless Computing

CS6501: Serverless Al Fall 2025 Lecture 4

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Some material taken/derived from:

- Berkeley CS 262a (Spring '18) by Ali Ghodsi and Ion Stoica
- Tyler Harter's HotCloud '18 OpenLambda talk
- @ 2025 released for use under a CC BY-SA license.

Learning objectives

- Know the motivation of serverless
- Learn the different generations of cloud computing
 - Virtual machines
 - Containers
 - Serverless functions
- Understand current limitations of FaaS

Motivation

When to use the cloud?

Data

- Large amounts of data can't store locally
- Shared data across users
- Long-term storage

Compute

- Need lots of CPUs for data processing
- Varying computing demands (resources)
- No admin (for managing your local hardware)

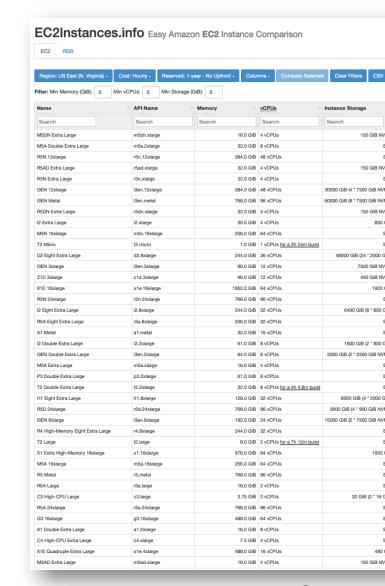
EC2 RDS EC2 Instance Comparison

EC2 Instances (724)

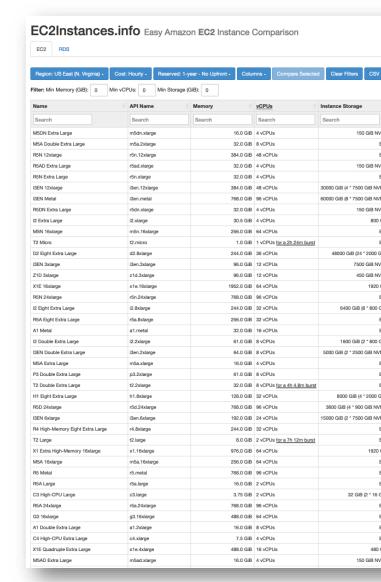
Based on your inputs, this is the lowest-cost EC2 instance: t4g.nano

Region: US East (N. Virginia) Cost: Hourly Reserved: 1-year - No Upfront Columns Clear Filters Filter: Min Memory (GiB): 0 Min vCPUs: 0 Min Storage (GiB): 0 Memory Linux On Demand cost API Name vCPUs Instance Storage Linux Reserved cost Windows On Demand cost Windows Reserved cost Search Search Search Search Search Search Search Search Search 16.0 GiB 4 vCPUs 150 GiB NVMe SSD Up to 25 Gigabit \$0.357000 hourly M5DN Extra Large m5dn.xlarge \$0.272000 hourly \$0.173000 hourly \$0.456000 hourly EBS only Up to 10 Gigabit M5A Double Extra Large m5a.2xlarge 32.0 GiB 8 vCPUs \$0.344000 hourly \$0.219000 hourly \$0.712000 hourly \$0.587000 hourly R5N 12xlarge r5n.12xlarge 384.0 GiB 48 vCPUs EBS only 50 Gigabit \$3.576000 hourly \$2,253000 hourly \$5.784000 hourly \$4,461000 hourly R5AD Extra Large 32.0 GiB 4 vCPUs 150 GiB NVMe SSD 10 Gigabit \$0.262000 hourly \$0.166000 hourly \$0.446000 hourly \$0.350000 hourly r5ad.xlarge 32.0 GiB 4 vCPUs EBS only Up to 25 Gigabit \$0.298000 hourly \$0.188000 hourly \$0.482000 hourly \$0.372000 hourly R5N Extra Large r5n.xlarge I3EN 12xlarge i3en.12xlarge 384.0 GiB 48 vCPUs 30000 GiB (4 * 7500 GiB NVMe SSD) 50 Gigabit \$5.424000 hourly \$3.694000 hourly \$7.632000 hourly \$5.902000 hourly I3EN Metal 60000 GiB (8 * 7500 GiB NVMe SSD) 100 Gigabit i3en.metal 768.0 GiB 96 vCPUs \$10,848000 hourly \$7,388000 hourly \$15,264000 hourly \$11,804000 hourly R5DN Extra Large r5dn.xlarge 32.0 GiB 4 vCPUs 150 GiB NVMe SSD Up to 25 Gigabit \$0.334000 hourly \$0.211000 hourly \$0.518000 hourly \$0.395000 hourly 30.5 GiB 4 vCPUs 800 GiB SSD Moderate \$0.853000 hourly \$0.424000 hourly \$0.973000 hourly \$0.565000 hourly 12 Extra Large i2.xlarge M5N 16xlarge m5n.16xlarge 256.0 GiB 64 vCPUs EBS only 75 Gigabit \$3.808000 hourly \$2.419000 hourly \$6.752000 hourly \$5.363000 hourly T2 Micro t2.micro 1.0 GiB 1 vCPUs for a 2h 24m burst EBS only Low to Moderate \$0.011600 hourly \$0.007200 hourly \$0.016200 hourly \$0.011800 hourly D2 Eight Extra Large d2.8xlarge 244.0 GiB 36 vCPUs 48000 GiB (24 * 2000 GiB HDD) 10 Gigabit \$5.520000 hourly \$3.216000 hourly \$6.198000 hourly \$3.300000 hourly I3EN 3xlarge i3en.3xlarge 96.0 GiB 12 vCPUs 7500 GiB NVMe SSD Up to 25 Gigabit \$1.356000 hourly \$0.924000 hourly \$1.908000 hourly \$1.476000 hourly 96 0 GIB 12 vCPUs 450 GiB NVMe SSD Up to 10 Gigabit Z1D 3xlarge z1d,3xlarge \$1,116000 hourly \$0,705000 hourly \$1,668000 hourly \$1,257000 hourly \$13,344000 hourly \$16,288000 hourly X1E 16xlarge x1e.16xlarge 1952.0 GiB 64 vCPUs 1920 GiB SSD 10 Gigabit \$8,223000 hourly \$11,167000 hourly R5N 24xlarge r5n.24xlarge 768.0 GiB 96 vCPUs EBS only 100 Gigabit \$7,152000 hourly \$4,506000 hourly \$11.568000 hourly \$8.922000 hourly 244.0 GiB 32 vCPUs 6400 GiB (8 * 800 GiB SSD) 10 Gigabit \$6.820000 hourly \$3.392000 hourly \$7.782000 hourly \$4.521000 hourly 12 Eight Extra Large i2.8xlarge R5A Eight Extra Large r5a.8xlarge 256.0 GiB 32 vCPUs EBS only Up to 10 Gigabit \$1,808000 hourly \$1,141000 hourly \$3,280000 hourly \$2.613000 hourly A1 Metal a1.metal 32.0 GiB 16 vCPUs EBS only Up to 10 Gigabit \$0.408000 hourly \$0.257000 hourly unavailable unavailable 12 Double Extra Large i2.2xlarge 61.0 GiB 8 vCPUs 1600 GiB (2 * 800 GiB SSD) High \$1.705000 hourly \$0.848000 hourly \$1.946000 hourly \$1.131000 hourly I3EN Double Extra Large i3en.2xlarge 64.0 GiB 8 vCPUs 5000 GiB (2 * 2500 GiB NVMe SSD) Up to 25 Gigabit \$0.904000 hourly \$0.616000 hourly \$1.272000 hourly \$0.984000 hourly M5A Extra Large m5a.xlarge 16.0 GiB 4 vCPUs EBS only Up to 10 Gigabit \$0.172000 hourly \$0.109000 hourly \$0.356000 hourly \$0.293000 hourly P3 Double Extra Large p3.2xlarge 61.0 GIB 8 vCPUs EBS only Up to 10 Gigabit \$3.060000 hourly \$2.088000 hourly \$3.428000 hourly \$2,456000 hourly T2 Double Extra Large 32.0 GiB 8 vCPUs for a 4h 4.8m burst t2.2xlarge EBS only Moderate \$0.371200 hourly \$0.230000 hourly \$0.433200 hourly \$0.292000 hourly H1 Eight Extra Large 128.0 GiB 32 vCPUs 8000 GIB (4 * 2000 GIB HDD) 10 Gigabit \$3.344000 hourly \$2.744000 hourly h1.8xlarge \$1.872000 hourly \$1,272000 hourly 3600 GiB (4 * 900 GiB NVMe SSD) 25 Gigabit R5D 24xlarge r5d.24xlarge 768.0 GiB 96 vCPUs \$6,912000 hourly \$4,362000 hourly \$11,328000 hourh \$8,778000 hourly I3EN 6xlarge i3en,6xlarge 192.0 GiB 24 vCPUs 15000 GiB (2 * 7500 GiB NVMe SSD) 25 Gigabit \$2,712000 hourly \$1.847000 hourly \$3.816000 hourly \$2.951000 hourly R4 High-Memory Eight Extra Large r4.8xlarge 244.0 GiB 32 vCPUs EBS only 10 Gigabit \$2,128000 hourly \$1,344000 hourly \$3.600000 hourly \$2.816000 hourly T2 Large t2.large 8.0 GiB 2 vCPUs for a 7h 12m burst EBS only Low to Moderate \$0.092800 hourly \$0.057500 hourly \$0.120800 hourly \$0.085500 hourly X1 Extra High-Memory 16xlarge x1.16xlarge 976.0 GiB 64 vCPUs 1920 GIB SSD High \$6.669000 hourly \$4.110000 hourly \$9.613000 hourly \$7.054000 hourly M5A 16xlarge m5a.16xlarge 256.0 GiB 64 vCPUs EBS only 12 Gigabit \$2.752000 hourly \$1.751000 hourly \$5.696000 hourly \$4.695000 hourly R5 Metal 768.0 GiB 96 vCPUs EBS only 25 Gigabit \$6.048000 hourly \$3.810000 hourly \$10.464000 hourly \$8,226000 hourly r5.metal R5A Large r5a.large 16.0 GiB 2 vCPUs EBS only 10 Gigabit \$0.113000 hourly \$0.071000 hourly \$0.205000 hourly \$0.163000 hourly C3 High-CPU Large 3.75 GiB 2 vCPUs 32 GiB (2 * 16 GiB SSD) Moderate \$0.105000 hourly \$0.073000 hourly \$0.188000 hourly \$0.165000 hourly c3.large R5A 24xlarge r5a.24xlarge 768.0 GiB 96 vCPUs EBS only 20 Gigabit \$5,424000 hourly \$3,423000 hourly \$9.840000 hourly \$7,839000 hourly G3 16xlarge g3.16xlarge 488.0 GiB 64 vCPUs EBS only 20 Gigabit \$4.560000 hourly \$3.112200 hourly \$7.504000 hourly \$6.056200 hourly A1 Double Extra Large a1.2xlarge 16.0 GiB 8 vCPUs EBS only Up to 10 Gigabit \$0.204000 hourly \$0.128500 hourly unavailable unavailable C4 High-CPU Extra Large c4.xlarge 7.5 GiB 4 vCPUs EBS only High \$0.199000 hourly \$0.126000 hourly \$0.383000 hourly \$0.310000 hourly X1E Quadruple Extra Large 488.0 GiB 16 vCPUs 480 GiB SSD Up to 10 Gigabit \$2.792000 hourly x1e.4xlarge \$3,336000 hourly \$2,056000 hourly \$4.072000 hourly M5AD Extra Large m5ad.xlarge 16.0 GiB 4 vCPUs 150 GiB NVMe SSD Up to 10 Gigabit \$0.206000 hourly \$0.132000 hourly \$0.390000 hourly \$0.316000 hourly

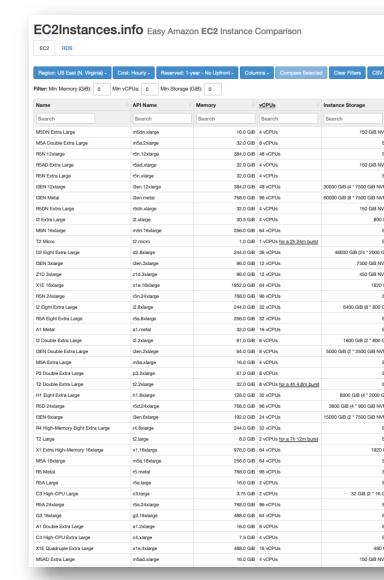
1. What type of instances?



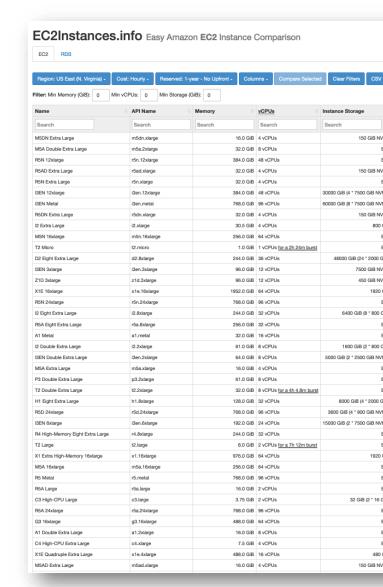
- 1. What type of instances?
- 2. How many to spin up?



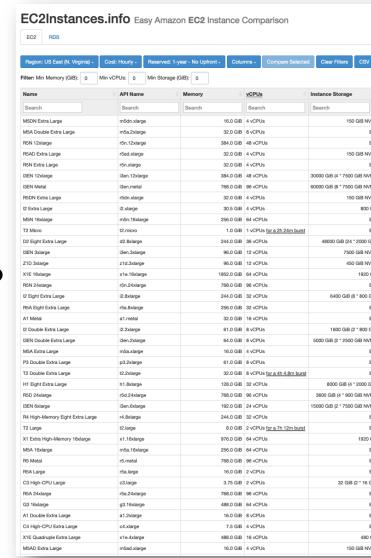
- 1. What type of instances?
- 2. How many to spin up?
- 3. What base image?



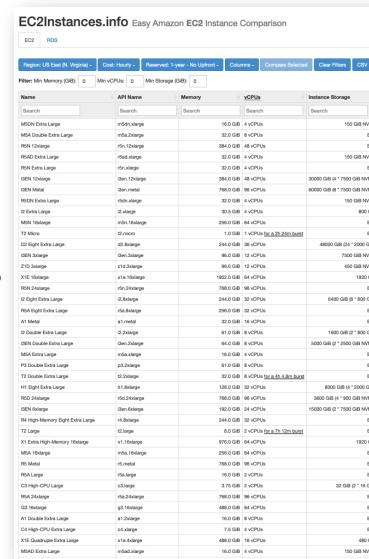
- 1. What type of instances?
- 2. How many to spin up?
- 3. What base image?
- 4. On-demand or spot?



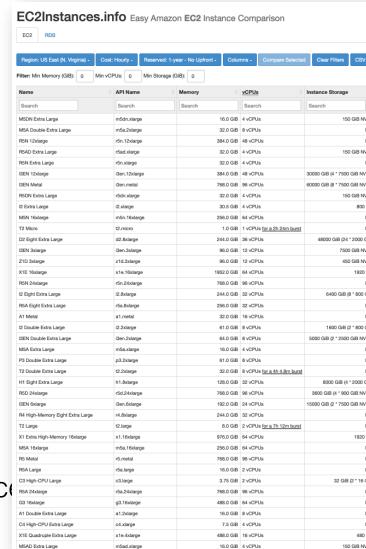
- 1. What type of instances?
- 2. How many to spin up?
- 3. What base image?
- 4. On-demand or spot?
- 5. What storage service to use?



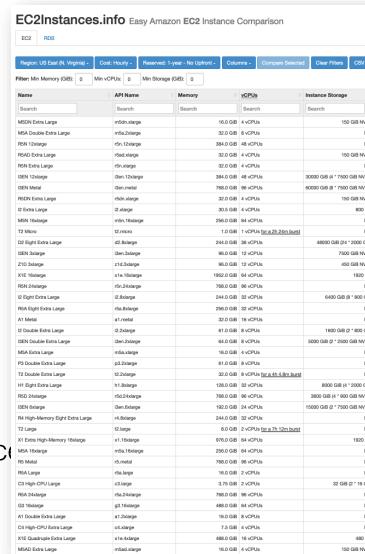
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- 6. And then wait to start...



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- 6. And then wait to start...
- 7. Not the end of the horror story:
 - 1. When to scale out?
 - 2. When to scale in?
 - 3. When to switch to different instance types?



- 1. What type of instances?
- 2. How many to spin up?
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- 5. What storage service to use?
- And then wait to start...
- 7. Not the end of the horror story:
 - When to scale out?
 - 2. When to scale in?
 - 3. When to switch to different instance types?
- 8. Go back to Step 1...



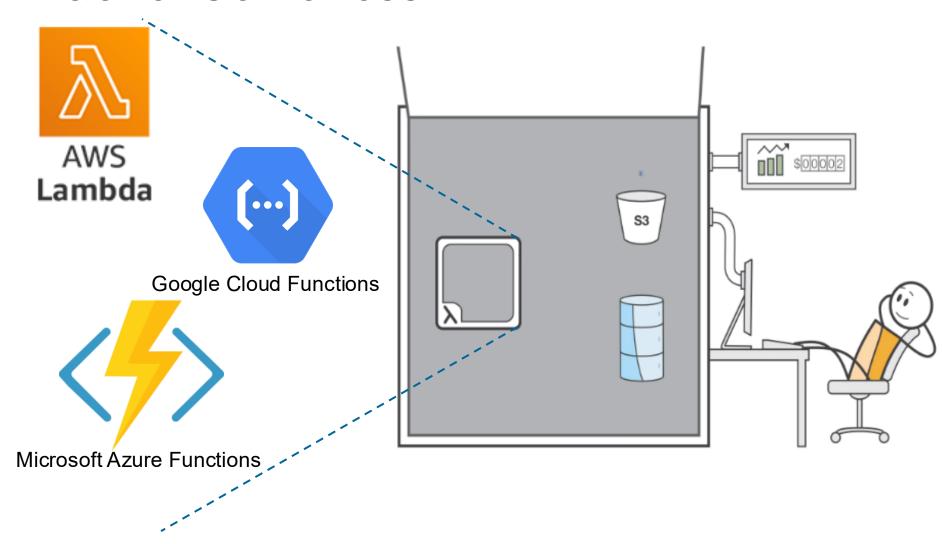
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	T2 Large	t2.large	8.0 GiB	2 vCPUs for a 7h 12m burst	
	X1 Extra High-Memory 16xlarge	x1.16xlarge	976.0 GiB	64 vCPUs	192
l	M5A 16xlarge	m5a.16xlarge	256.0 GiB	64 vCPUs	
١	R5 Metal	r5.metal	768.0 GiB	96 vCPUs	
	R5A Large	r5a.large	16.0 GiB	2 vCPUs	
				2 vCPUs	32 GiB (2 * 16

Why isn't there just one "cloud button" for all this?

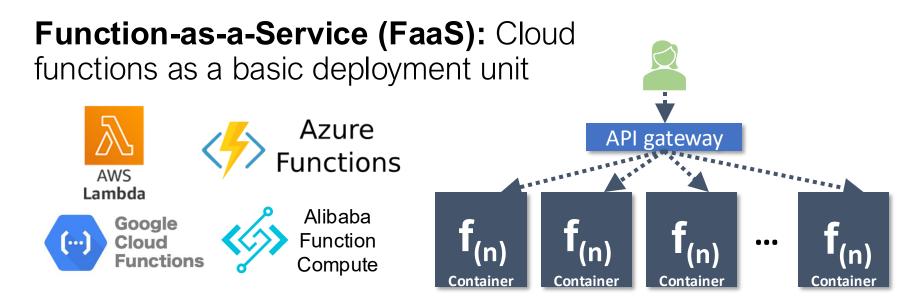
Decision paralysis??Go for Serverless!



What is serverless computing?

What is serverless computing?

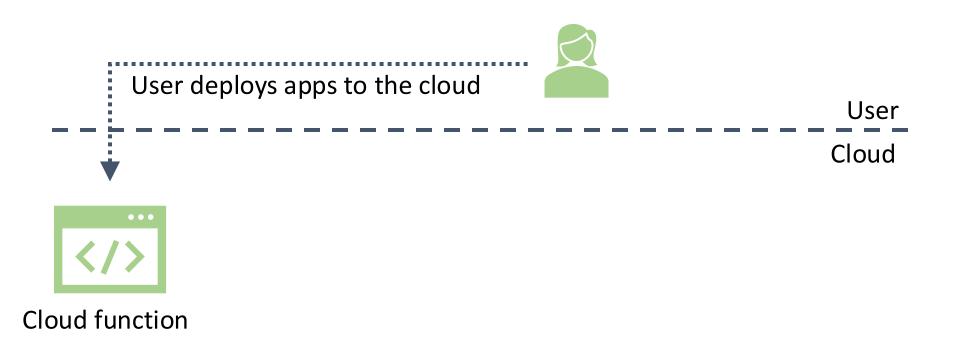
Serverless computing (Function-as-a-Service, or FaaS) is a programming abstraction that enables users to upload programs, run them at (virtually) any scale, and pay only for the resources used

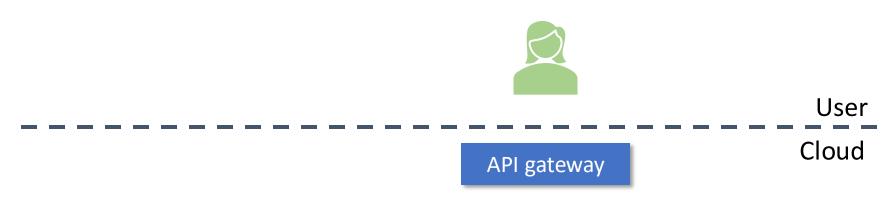




User

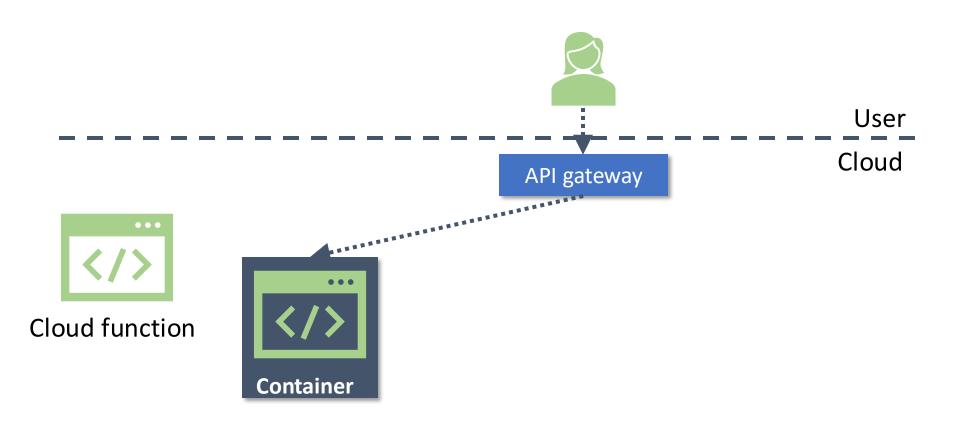
Cloud

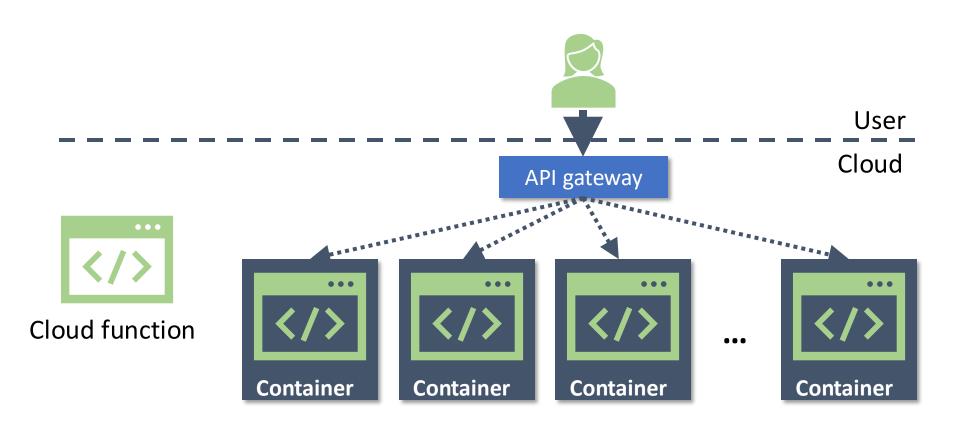


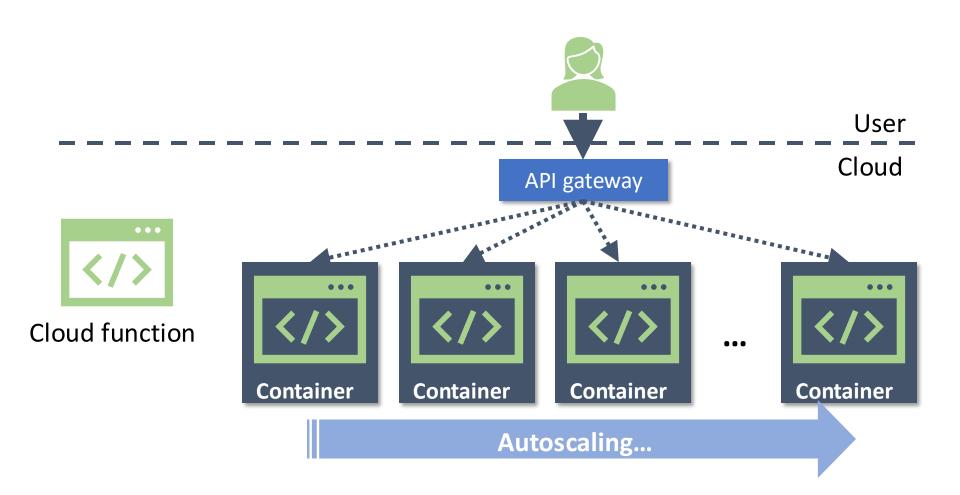




Cloud function







A car analogy



https://www.slideshare.net/loige/building-a-serverless-company-with-nodejs-react-and-the-serverless-framework-jsday-2017-verona

AWS Lambda: 1st gen → current gen

Lambda capacity config keeps evolving:

- 300 seconds 900 seconds (15 minutes)
single-core two-core → up to 6 cores
1.5 GB → 10 GB memory
512 MB → up to 10GB of /tmp file system

Python, Java, Node.js, Go, ...

Pricing:

- Fine-grained billing: 1-millisecond billed duration
- \$0.20 per 1M requests (invocations charge \$)
- \$0.0000166667 for every GB-second (compute time) charges \$\$)
- 6,000 1 GB Lambda functions for one second: 10¢



Good properties of FaaS

- Operationally
 - "No-ops" (almost) no configuration
 - Autoscaling down to 0
 - Closer to pay-per-use (rather than pay-perallocation)
 - Fine-grained billing



FaaS today

- FaaS is used mostly for simple or coarse-grained tasks
 - Stateless, embarrassingly parallel tasks, simple workflows
 - ETL, software testing, API middleware, image processing, etc.
 - Glue to other serverless backends
- Lots of problems are limiting FaaS' scope
 - Poor performance (vs. time to run actual code) at scale
 - Mismatch of infrastructure support (e.g., today's OS not designed for FaaS)
 - Very resource-inefficient and costly for serverless providers
 - Lack of mature support for accelerators (GPU/TPU)
 - ...
- Orders of magnitude slower and inefficient for many "killer" apps
 - LLM inference, microservices, ...

Limitations of FaaS

Banned inbound network

No guaranteed data availability

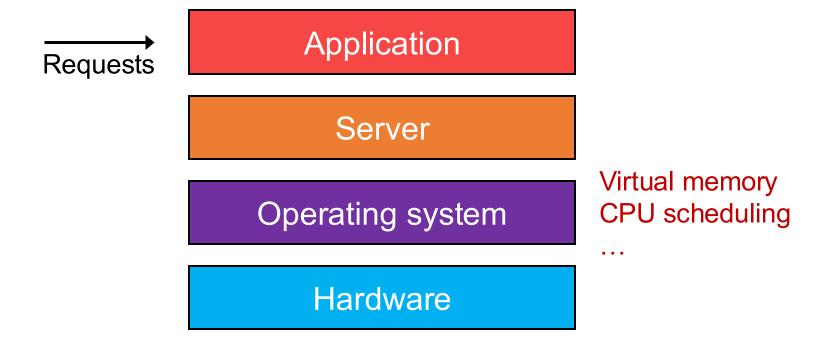
Lambdas are resource-constrained

Lambdas have limited execution time

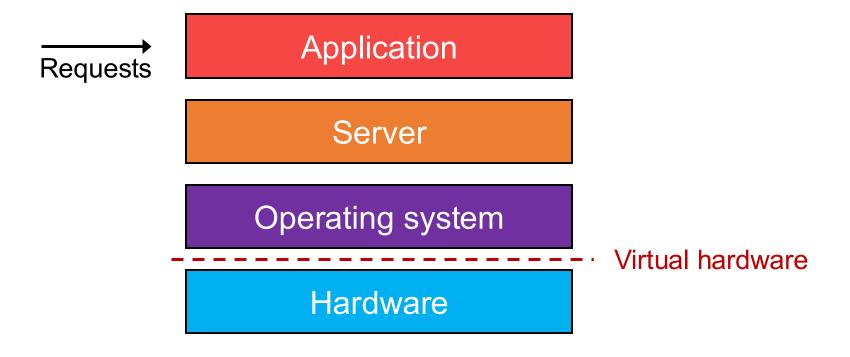
High cold startup cost and invocation cost

Cloud evolution history – A virtualization story

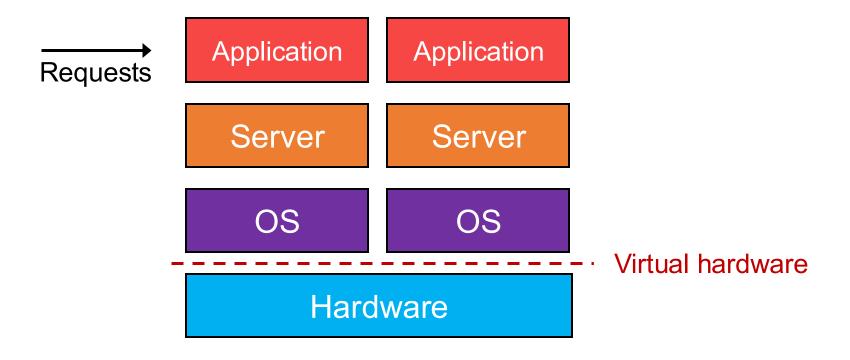
Classic server app stack



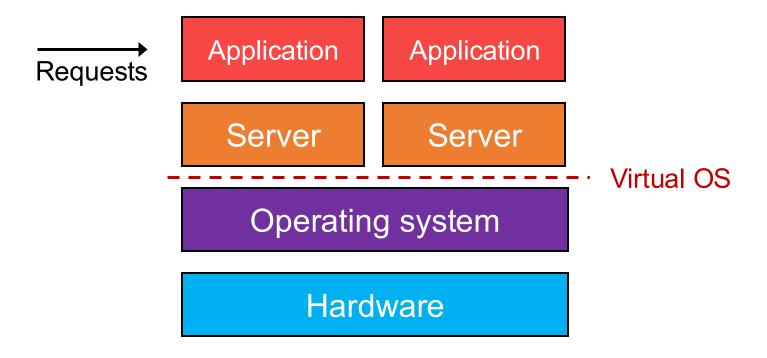
1st generation: virtual machine (VM)



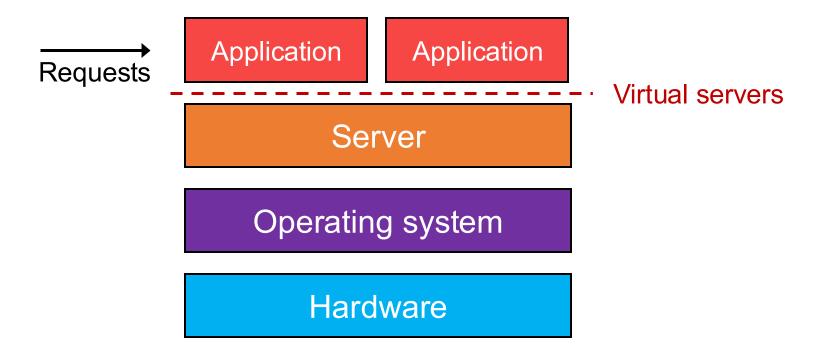
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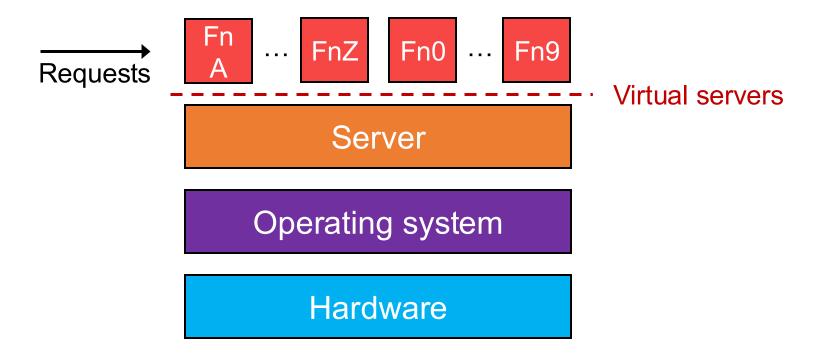
2nd generation: containers



3rd generation: serverless functions



3rd generation: serverless functions



Tradeoff discussion

Serverless functions (AWS Lambdas)

Containers

VMs

Isolation?

Flexibility?

Overhead?