The first two chapters of this book have provided an introductory look at cloud-based computing and how similar a cloud database is to a regular database. Although there are many similarities, you’ve also seen some of the differences between a cloud database and a local database. Chapter 6 discusses many more of these differences in greater detail.

Chapter 2 also took an in-depth look at the design patterns and factors that companies must take into account when considering moving to a cloud computing architecture. Deciding to move to a cloud computing solution isn’t cut and dried; you must consider many options when designing cloud solutions. The rest of the book, including this chapter, builds on the information from Chapter 2.

Before you get started with the Azure platform, you must first register for an Azure account. After the account is created, you have access to all of Azure’s features and functionality. This chapter shows you the account options, walks you through creating an Azure account, and then introduces you to options and T-SQL syntax statements you can use to create, modify, and delete important types of objects in SQL Azure, such as databases, users, and stored procedures. You also spend a few pages looking at how to connect to a SQL Azure database from different environments.

Creating Your Azure Account

Creating an Azure account is simple, but it takes quite a few steps because of the amount of information required. To begin setting up your Azure account, open your browser and go to www.microsoft.com/windowsazure/offers. This URL takes you to the Windows Azure Platform Offers page, shown in Figure 3-1. This page lists several packages based on your usage (transactions, connections, and so on) and storage. You can see detailed information about each package by clicking the View Details button in the comparison table on the page.

It’s highly recommend that you select the Introductory Special package to begin working with Azure. With this package, you get the following at no charge:

- 25 hours of small compute instance, 500MB of storage, and 10,000 storage transactions on Windows Azure
- 1 Web Edition database on SQL Azure
- 100,000 access control transactions and 2 service bus connections on AppFabric
- 500MB in and 500MB out for data transfer (per region)
Figure 3-1. Azure offers

**Note** The Introductory Special offer, per the details of the offer, ends on October 31, 2010. Standard rates will apply after that date. It’s unknown at the time of this writing whether a free or “lite” version will continue to be offered. Standard rates are based on storage, computer, AppFabric transactions, and data transfers. You can find information regarding the exact standard rates by clicking the Details button for any of the offers.