



Ready? Steady? Go!

Office 365 promises to transform how organisations provision workplace collaboration and productivity applications. Find out if Microsoft's cloud-based service is right for your organisation and if you are ready to make the leap.

Fast facts: Office 365

- Microsoft intends to provide service updates to Office 365 every 90 days. Any new releases of applications, such as Exchange, will be made available to Office 365 subscribers in advance of traditional on-premise versions, which could result in competitive advantage
- Office 365 is a service offering, which means licences grant temporary use rights and do not have a buy back-to-perpetual provision
- Most elements of Office 365 were designed with the cloud in mind, while Business Productivity Online Standard was effectively retrofitted for cloud deployment
- Pre-configured plans E1 and K1 are expected to be the most applicable to enterprise customers
- Office 365 enables organisations to establish a hybrid environment with some users working via the cloud and others from on-premises deployments, thereby minimising the risk of business disruption if connectivity is lost

Analysts are predicting that several million users will have migrated to Microsoft's cloud-based Office 365 suite by this time next year as they abandon legacy mail platforms in favour of a state-of-art platform that requires little or no capital investment and a lengthy implementation.

Access to a cloud-based Exchange email service will be the main driver for adoption, followed by SharePoint and Lync. The capacious 25 gigabyte mailbox on offer to enterprise users of Office 365 will help fuel this phased adoption.

Launched at the end of June 2011, Office 365 provides organisations with cloud-hosted versions of Exchange 2010, SharePoint, Office Web Apps and Lync - which combines instant messaging with presence, audioconferencing and videoconferencing features. Customers can also procure Office 2010 Professional via an Office 365 subscription.

Unlike other cloud-based offerings, Office 365 components can be bought separately or as part of six pre-configured offers, providing organisations with both predictable costs and flexibility.

As a result, organisations can limit their expenditure according to the current scale and needs of their business. Prices for the pre-configured offers range from £2.60 per month for a kiosk user with Exchange and SharePoint to £15.75 per month for an enterprise user including a desktop Office licence and Lync Plus for voice communications.

Andy Goddard, Practice Leader for Workplace and Software at Computacenter, comments: "Office 365 provides organisations with the most cost-effective alternative to hosting email and other workplace applications internally. IT departments will not only be released from the cyclical pain and expenditure of upgrades but also the day-to-day burden of backup, security patching and capacity planning and so on."

Ensuring confidence in the cloud

As with any cloud-based offering, the risk of service outages and security breaches have been widely debated by the press, analysts and user community alike since the launch of Office 365.

In a recent outage, however, although Microsoft's older platform Business Productivity Online Standard (BPOS) went down Office 365 stayed online, which will help to improve customer confidence that the service has indeed evolved and become of age for enterprises.

Microsoft has invested heavily in disaster recovery capabilities, globally-redundant backups, and extensive privacy features to prevent Office 365 from falling victim to such outages. As Andy comments: "Office 365 is designed to provide a highly available and highly secure service to corporates. With the added benefit of federation services to facilitate single sign-on, Office 365 will prevent customer identity information from being exposed via the internet."

Office 365 also supports additional security measures to protect sensitive information, such as Secure/Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions (S/MIME) for public key encryption and digital signatures as well as critical information rights management for restricting access to and external distribution of documents, email, and even voicemail messages."

Under the service level agreement (SLA), customers will receive 25 per cent off their monthly payment if uptime falls below 99.9 per cent to 99 per cent, half of the sum back if it falls below 99 per cent and a complete refund for anything under 95 per cent.

Cutting costs and increasing productivity

For many organisations, it won't be a case of 'if' but 'when' will they migrate to Office 365. An exceptionally large number of enterprise customers are still running their email services on Exchange 2003 platforms, which is rapidly becoming untenable as a robust and effective service.

These legacy platforms not only lead to outage and scalability problems but users also have to cope with severely constrained mailbox sizes. To address these challenges, organisations must make significant capital investment – a process they will have to go through again in another five years when the email platform once again becomes outdated. Office 365 provides not only enables customers to migrate to a new platform at a fraction of the cost but also eliminates the need for any future upgrades.

"One of our customers using Exchange 2003 is restricted to mailboxes of 200 megabytes, which rapidly disappears in today's world of multi-media attachments," comments Andy. "It's hardly surprising then that have already chosen to adopt Office 365, which will provide 25 gigabytes per mailbox. To deliver this kind of capacity via an internal email platform would have required investment in additional storage resources, which the customer has now avoided."

As well as saving on implementation costs, organisations can also save valuable time by signing up to Office 365. As Andy explains: "The average Exchange 2010 implementation costs a mid-sized enterprise around £500,000 and can take up to nine months to complete. With Office 365, an organisation can plan, prepare and migrate 2,500 mailboxes end-to-end in around three months."

Although the modular nature of Office 365 will enable organisations to sign up for specific applications, such as email, rather than the full suite, it can make the licensing model rather complicated. Even more so if Enterprise Agreements need to be considered or if a customer has to upgrade their Outlook client - Office 365 enterprise users must use Outlook 2007 or 2010.

Minimising migration risks

To help identify the right licensing model and determine if Office 365 is viable and suitable, Computacenter is offering customers a five-day assessment: 'Are you Office 365 ready?'

Through a series of workshops, Computacenter will help to:

- Establish whether your organisation is right for Office 365
- Identify if there are users who are not suited to Office 365 and therefore might require a co-existence or hybrid scenario
- Evaluate the most cost-effective and flexible licensing options for your organisation and the impact on existing Microsoft agreements
- Identify support requirements above and beyond the basic Microsoft offering
- Ascertain the actual number of mailboxes that are required to minimise email subscription costs
- Identify any business or application constraints that would prevent adoption
- Qualify what it will cost to migrate and transform to Office 365

"Despite 100,000 organisations taking part in the open beta programme, Office 365 will not be right for every company or user community," comments Andy. "For example tightly regulated sectors, such as financial services, are less likely to be suited to this type of cloud model than for example retail companies or service providers."

Office 365 is based on a multi-tenant model, which means data from multiple customers might be housed on the same hardware resources. This model is fundamental to providing economies of scale and delivering cost advantages over the older model BPOS, which allowed for dedicated environments for larger customers – an option that is no longer available.

UK customers can expect their data to be hosted primarily in Microsoft's Dublin datacenter, with failover for resilience to Amsterdam. With Microsoft fully compliant with EU data legislation, data sovereignty barriers of old are removed except for the most critical of organisations, such as central government organisations.

Cost-effective alternatives

Public cloud offerings, such as Office 365, however, are not the only route to more cost-effective and scalable email services. For example, Computacenter's C³Mail and Collaboration also provides access to Exchange, SharePoint and Lync, via a predictable 'utility' billing model.

Part of Computacenter's pragmatic approach to cloud-based IT services, C³Mail and Collaboration offers the flexibility of a dedicated or shared infrastructure implemented and managed on your behalf either on-premises or in one of Computacenter's high availability environments.

As with its public cloud counterparts, this approach limits the need for investment in internal infrastructure assets, support staff, and management methodologies and provides organisations with a predictable operational cost per month per mailbox.

Whether an organisation is ready for full cloud adoption or wants to retain an on-premises platform, Computacenter has the services and skills to help. "We will help you find the right way to escape the constant cycle of expenditure on email and other workplace applications without compromising security or service levels. We have extensive experience of helping customers licence, design, migrate, upgrade and manage their enterprise email infrastructures, and typically transform around 150,000 mailboxes a year," comments Andy.

Further Information

Find about how Office 365 could help your organisation here
www.microsoft.com/en-us/office365/enterprise-solutions/business-benefits.aspx

Read more about Computacenter's C³Mail and Collaboration offering
http://www.computacenter.com/services/solutions/C3/C3_Mail/