A Guide to Improving Availability and Taking Control of Office 365 Email

The rapid growth of Microsoft Office 365 is creating opportunities for IT managers to leverage Exchange Online as an efficient cloud-based email platform. But Office 365 also brings challenges, particularly in meeting today's stringent Availability, cost control and regulatory compliance requirements. By using modern Availability software, IT can leverage on-premises backup and recovery to assert greater control over Office 365 access and protection. Here's how.

Businesses of all sizes are migrating to Microsoft Office 365 at a rapid pace. Over the last two years Office 365 has become the industry's most widely used business cloud service. Nearly 80% of IT decision makers surveyed by Gartner in early 2016 said they were either currently using or planning to use Office 365 software and services.[1]

The growth of Office 365 is a direct result of the immense value it delivers to organizations, particularly in allowing IT to manage and scale email through Exchange Online. With Office 365, IT teams do not have to build and maintain their own separate email infrastructure and can therefore deploy personnel and resources more strategically.

However, there are also challenges IT managers and administrators must address to ensure that Office 365 email meets company requirements for Availability, cost containment and regulatory compliance. This applies to any company using Office 365 for email, from small and midsize businesses to larger enterprise running Office 365 in a hybrid cloud environment.

Understanding Office 365 Email Challenges

One of the most important Availability challenges with Office 365—as it is with any application—is the need to ensure that you are in control of your data to access it for disaster recovery, regulatory compliance, e-discovery or any other reason. Remember: It is your data, and if it is not available it is your responsibility.

The key to ensuring you can maintain control is to follow the 3-2-1 best practices rule for data protection, which is:

3. Maintain at least *three* copies of your data.
2. Store your data on at least *two* different types of storage media.
1. Keep *one* copy of the backups in an off-site location.

With Office 365 backup, you can follow the same protection strategy but almost flip it upside down. Microsoft covers multiple copies and offers varying levels of redundancies and geographic disbursement to address the majority of possible issues. But there is one important step you must take:

Keep one of your backups *somewhere* else.

One of the most common locations for "somewhere else" is on premises. With local backup, your data will be at your fingertips at all times. This means you can control where your data is located to manage costs and compliance.

Local backup also allows you to control backup and recovery performance and be far more agile in managing and protecting data. For example, you can modify recovery objectives as data ages and there is less of a need for it to be immediately available.

1   "Survey: Businesses Keen on Office 365 Despite Some Qualms," Redmond Channel Partner, April 15, 2016

Failure to have a separate backup can put your company at risk for unplanned downtime of key applications and services, and a loss of productivity for users of those applications and services. You may also be unable to satisfy compliance requirements or meet recovery time and recovery point objectives (RTPOs™).

Local control is particularly valuable in managing Office 365. Microsoft offers a wide range of retention and preservation options, including different policies for different types of files. Many of these options are customizable. While this is a great feature, it also poses some degree of risk, which IT teams can mitigate with local backup.

One risk is the possibility of user error or user confusion about Microsoft retention and preservation policies. A user may think he or she is retaining emails, when, in fact, the data was not retained. Another risk is that users may not understand the costs involved in using Office 365 for retention and preservation. Cloud storage can get expensive and cost containment can be problematic in today's environment, where employees use email ubiquitously and think nothing about attaching large files such as PowerPoint presentations to their messages.

Addressing Office 365 Challenges Head-On

Whether your organization has completely migrated to Office 365 or you use a hybrid on-premises Exchange and Office 365 deployment, your business objectives remain the same: You need to have an independent backup of your data outside of the original location to meet Availability, data protection, data recovery and compliance requirements.

The best way to achieve these objectives—and to control costs at the same time—is to deploy modern Availability software that has been designed specifically to meet the backup, recovery and compliance challenges of Office 365 email.

You may want to securely back up Office 365 email data on premises, so you can quickly recover individual mailbox items and efficiently perform e-discovery of email archives. Or you may want to use Azure cloud storage for your second type of storage media. The right software will allow you to:

- **Reduce costs:** Data growth, particularly in email, is an ongoing challenge for IT teams. In many cases, emails and their attachments need to be saved—sometimes for decades—to meet regulatory compliance and e-discovery requirements. With an on-premises backup solution, you control when to move data to less expensive storage media as it goes through its lifecycle.

- **Improve Availability:** Organizations are under greater pressure today to improve RTPOs. In the Always-On Enterprise™, any downtime is unacceptable. If employees can't find and restore email data they need to do their jobs, their performance and productivity will suffer. With on-premises backup, you can achieve faster access to your data, leveraging tools to accelerate Availability through granular, context-based searches.

- **Take control of your data:** With on-premises Availability, the IT team can exert greater control of where data is stored based on its value to the organization and how quickly it may need to be recovered. Data that is still current and may need to be accessed quickly can be both on premises and in the cloud. You also gain control by having flexible recovery options, leveraging either granular searches or access to the entire database, depending on your requirements.

What to Look for in an Office 365 Availability Solution

In evaluating options for Office 365 Availability solutions, there are several key goals and objectives you should target. These include:

- **Empowering your IT staff to take control of your organization's Office 365 data:** Microsoft takes care of the hardware and system maintenance, but it is critical that you protect and control your data on your terms.
- **Reducing the time and effort required to find and restore email data:** This will help to ensure Availability and meet more stringent RTPOs for regulatory compliance and e-discovery.
- **Protecting against data loss scenarios that are not covered by standard or customized retention policies:** While Microsoft takes on many management tasks in Office 365, it is your data and your responsibility to control it.
- **Facilitating the management of email data under one strategy:** Many organizations use hybrid email deployments, which means data could be in Office 365 or in an on-premises Exchange server. You want to be able to use the same recovery technology independent of where the data resides, so you should use a solution from a vendor that takes a holistic approach to Availability.

Choosing the Right Solution

IT managers now have the opportunity to use the industry's leading modern Availability software to support their Office 365 environments. **Veeam Backup *for Microsoft Office 365*** enables organizations to achieve the 3-2-1 rule in data protection while reducing costs, mitigating risk and enabling greater IT control over critical Availability requirements.

With **Veeam Backup *for Microsoft Office 365***, you can retrieve Office 365 Exchange Online mailbox items from a cloud-based instance of Office 365 and back up this mailbox data into the same format that Microsoft Exchange uses natively.

These capabilities allow for quick search and recovery of individual mailbox items residing in either archived Office 365 content or on-premises Exchange backups. Mailbox items can be restored directly to an Office 365 mailbox or an on-premises Exchange mailbox, saved as a file, emailed as an attachment or exported as a PST.

You can also leverage advanced context-based granular search capabilities and flexible recovery and export options to ensure that you can recover exactly what you need when you need it. This will help you manage RTPOs closely and meet compliance and e-discovery requirements cost efficiently.

Conclusion

The growth of Microsoft Office 365 provides an opportunity for companies of all sizes to support today's workforce without the need to maintain a separate email infrastructure. This allows IT managers to free up resources and minimize their on-premises footprint.

In order to fully leverage the benefits of Office 365, however, IT decision makers must empower their teams to control their Office 365 email data and ensure that their organizations are utilizing the 3-2-1 rule in data protection. This means using Availability solutions that achieve on-premises backup and recovery of Office 365 email data.

With the right solution in place, IT managers can reduce costs, improve Availability and maintain control of vital email data to meet their most stringent data protection, compliance and e-discovery requirements.

Veeam Backup *for Microsoft Office 365* is the industry's leading modern Availability solution, designed to meet all of your key challenges in accessing, controlling and protecting Office 365 email data.

To learn more about how you can improve Availability and take control of your Office 365 email data, please visit Veeam at https://www.veeam.com/backup-microsoft-office-365.html.