



OFFICE 365: CONQUER CROSS-TENANT MIGRATION OBSTACLES

Helping companies unravel the mysteries of Office 365 cross-tenant migrations



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This white paper explores how consultants and IT teams can help companies unravel the mysteries of Office 365 cross-tenant migrations. It is based on knowledge gleaned from the 40-million mailboxes that Binary Tree has migrated on behalf of customers.



INTRODUCTION: OFFICE 365 MIGRATION MOMENTUM

The audience for Office 365 has steadily grown, with Microsoft noting in its fiscal third-quarter earnings call that there are more than 100 million workers using the cloud service on a monthly basis. Half of its Exchange installed customer base is now on Office 365, as well. This current rate of adoption will ensure that Microsoft tops 120 million active monthly users by year's end.

Such strong momentum has led some in the industry to wonder about the future of Office 365 migrations. Will the market slow down? In combination with the debut of Microsoft's own FastTrack onboarding service, they also ponder whether those companies that haven't yet switched will be in any great need of professional consulting and services to help make the move.

These are valid questions, and the truth is that it isn't unreasonable to expect some decline in the Office 365 on-boarding business. But both consultants and internal IT staff alike should gear up to prepare for new Office 365 migration challenges.

THE NEXT WAVE OF OFFICE 365 MIGRATIONS

Many companies will need post-migration migration help: That's particularly true when it comes to aiding customers' movements within Office 365 environments. These migrations are about moving one tenant – that is, a uniquely identified group of administrative domains, users, security groups and subscriptions – from one security boundary to another. And it's no easy task.

The most prominent use case for cross-tenant migrations is the merger and acquisition scenario. Microsoft helps companies get into the cloud, said Microsoft MVP Justin Harris, who is Manager of Product Architecture at Binary Tree. "The Fast Track Center is an incredible tool that a lot of our customers have used to get their data moved in to help adopt Office 365 in general," he explained.

But aiding users once they're within Office 365 with tasks such as cross-tenant migrations are not a strong point of the Fast Track Center. That, of course, may be a common requirement when one company buys or merges with another

– an activity whose popularity has skyrocketed in recent years. “The number of reported M&A transactions and deal value worldwide hit record levels in 2015,” states the WilmerHale 2016 M&A Report. Global M&A deal volume increased 4 percent, it notes, from 31,963 deals in 2014 to 33,365 in 2015, surpassing the 32,856 deals at the peak of the market in 2005. What this means to you is that there’s now a higher chance you’ll find yourself involved in one of these projects.

When companies using Office 365 come together in a business affiliation or sell off a piece of their business to a third party, Harris said, you “have to somehow

sharepoint.com. That’s somewhat clunky, and a more fluid moniker, like BBCDS.onmicrosoft.com, would have its advantages for those businesses planning to use SharePoint Online.

“You really have to move to a different environment,” Harris said.

Still, that’s a much smaller makeup of the cross-tenant migration market.

“Companies coming together or separating apart is the biggest use case for these migrations that Binary Tree has encountered,” Harris said.

“Once you’re on Office 365, that’s a pretty complex process depending on the workloads they’re using. To get this sort of data combined or split apart can

“THE FAST TRACK CENTER IS AN INCREDIBLE TOOL THAT OUR CUSTOMERS USE TO GET THEIR DATA MOVED IN TO HELP ADOPT OFFICE 365.” –JUSTIN HARRIS, BINARYTREE

get those users and their data out of one tenant and into another.”

Another use case for tenant-to-tenant migrations revolves around mistakes administrators make. They may, for example, set up an initial tenant for a project and load users into it before realizing they need to change some things. Perhaps the domain name choice was unfortunate, for example. Since Office 365 and SharePoint URLs are linked, a URL like BiggestBestCloseoutDiscountStore.onmicrosoft.com would translate into BiggestBestCloseoutDiscountStore.

be interesting.”

THE USER EXPERIENCE MATTERS

It often becomes tricky to migrate data from one tenant to another in these situations because of the toll it may take on the user experience. While Microsoft does offer guidance to help accomplish the task, it’s not optimum as far as Harris is concerned. The trouble is that its approach will lead to users experiencing downtime. And, depending on the industry and the application or process context, even a minor down period could be highly problematic.

Take, for example, the case of utility

companies in the throes of a cross-tenant migration as the result of a merger. When it comes to mission-critical utility infrastructure, there can't be a gap in the ability to respond to customers' emergency alerts. There's no time to waste, for example, when someone reports a downed telephone pole. If alerts about those problems are filtered in from outsourcers as inbound email requests, the merging entities can't risk not being able to immediately access them and quickly act on them. "The idea of downtime for email is very different for them," Harris said. "The idea of an outage is just not acceptable."

Unfortunately, because a tenant must contain uniquely identified domains, the same domain name cannot exist in the source tenant and target tenant together in Office 365. Following Microsoft's

does not meet the user experience marker for customers."

While the utility companies' employees would have cause to be vexed about this, so too would their customers. After all, why wouldn't they be upset to learn that a migration process was put in place knowing that it could potentially keep urgent messages from being speedily conveyed to the appropriate parties?

Some may contend that it may be going too far to call the results of taking this approach an outage per se, since the mail isn't getting lost, Harris noted. But whenever there's a deadline at stake during a tenant-to-tenant migration – whether it's for a utility company to react to an emergency notification or for a salesperson to respond to an email with a quote to win a deal – its direct impact on

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currently published guidance for these migrations leads to effectively creating a bad mail exchanger (MX) record. As a result, mail starts to queue up while the source domain name is moved over to the target domain, he explained – not good news for the merging utility companies. While third-party tools can expedite that move to varying degrees, there still will be a backlog of messages. So, relying on this approach "probably

the business is equivalent to the impact of an outage.

THE SPIDER WEB OF MIGRATIONS

There's even more that may be at risk during a tenant-to-tenant migration. Office 365 serves as much as possible as a single focal point for as many IT resources as Microsoft can provide to customers – email, collaboration, unified communications (UC) and call management, videoconferencing,

storage, and so on. Content within SharePoint Online, for example, can reside inside a tenant, as can content in its effective extensions or integrations to services like OneDrive and Sway. Meanwhile, Skype for Business in the cloud makes it possible to register a user's office desk phone with Office 365, enabling yet another service and tenant-affiliated content.

Now, when you're talking about merging two companies and migrating tenants, you're "not just looking at inbound email," Harris said. The aforementioned utilities company with a merger underway, for instance, may rely on switching to a call-based structure as a backup process to receiving email alert information. "How do we start to orchestrate this for a customer?" he asked.

ADDRESSING THE CROSS-TENANT MIGRATION CHALLENGE

Harris summed up the cross-tenant migration difficulties, particularly around email, listing the hard segregations of boundaries, the requirement that domains can be located only in one place, and even the fact that SharePoint Online with custom development can make it harder to decommission a legacy tenant. "It may be a period of time before you can actually move all your users out, or before you can decommission all of the apps and maybe even before you can get the domain name back out of the source tenant and into the new target tenant," he said.

With so many migration obstacles facing businesses, there's only one way to approach the problem: Tackle it from the user experience standpoint.

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The spider web of connections that surround tenants with their domains, domain names and included Active Directory objects – users, security groups, computers, subscriptions and the like –all must be addressed in a meaningful way before a migration can be successfully completed. "In addition to streaming data over, look at the orchestration of what other content must be there," cautioned Harris.

That takes different forms:

- Whether a cross-tenant migration is the result of M&As, mistakes or any other reasons, you need to meet end users' expectations that they'll all wind up in the same tenant under the same domain name at the same time. That's particularly critical in an M&A scenario, where the involved organizations probably would like to make this claim real in both their employees' and

WITH BINARY TREE'S POWER365 PLATFORM, THOUGH, "YOU CAN **USE THE SAME PUBLIC FACING DOMAIN** NAME ACROSS MULTIPLE TENANTS." —JUSTIN HARRIS, BINARYTREE

customers' eyes the day the business deal is announced.

- Make the administrative/consultant experience as seamless as possible too, including assurances that the efforts will be transparent and successful.
- Join forces with other industry partners if doing so will make customers' transformation progress as easy as possible.

BINARY TREE TAKES ON THE JOB

In May, Binary Tree introduced the first components of a new cloud platform that consultants and IT administrators can use to help speed customers' tenant-to-tenant migrations to successful conclusions.

With its heritage as an email migration company, its focus is on email workload tenant-to-tenant migrations – and of course, on how users will experience them. The starting aim is to conquer the complexities that keep end users' email in a disruptive state as the transition takes place. A massive amount of orchestration is required to fully accomplish this. Today, the tools that exist to help with these moves generally only handle a portion of the required tasks – and mostly for environments that aren't particularly complex.

Even then, there's no domain name

sharing across tenants, which just is not possible in Office 365. With Binary Tree's Power365 platform, though, "you can use the same public facing domain name across multiple tenants," Harris said, though with tenant registration restrictions. It has put in place a structure that is an address rewrite, without requiring any human involvement. Binary Tree's differentiating approach is to plainly and tightly integrate this capability in alignment with where a company is in its migration phase, he explained.

So, "when I tell it cut over these ten users from source to target, I know that I no longer must deal with a rewrite for them," he said. "The rewrite platform is automatically updated." This is all about keeping things integrated and making sure the user experience is aligned with the technology behind it, he said.

This meets the goal of a newly merged company to have a single domain name shared by all users and visible to them and to all external customers in emails as soon as the deal is closed. All that's needed to remove the issue of downtime is to just point inbound mail into its platform at the cutover point.

The solution efficiently circumvents the spider web of connections that span domain names and users, groups,

SharePoint Online sites and so on. This avoids further outage concerns for a tenant-to-tenant migration. “You won’t have outages through this environment,” Harris explained, noting that Binary Tree knows how such issues originate and protects against that. “We help ensure that users get switched over at the time you choose the cutover event for them. The goal is zero downtime.”

Another key differentiator relates to the experience for tying on-premises Active Directory objects into tenant-to-tenant migrations. Many businesses have Active Directory objects on-premises, meaning that changes to those objects can’t be made directly in the cloud. Binary Tree’s history working with on-premises products and its vast directory synchronization experience helps it orchestrate any number of on-premises Active Directory domains as part of a cross-tenant migration. This ensures that the process is conducted as a single event. That’s in contrast to requiring laborious and repetitive orchestration processes between source and target tenants.

“Why would the orchestration be limited to just the cloud?” Harris said, noting that was a critical insight for Binary Tree. “Why shouldn’t we be able to manipulate any number of on-premises Active Directory domains as part of the migration?”

Consultants can choose and customize the workflow to their customers’ cutover, “and it will deal with the manipulation on-premises” for objects with immutable IDs, he said. “It will do

whatever manipulation is needed on-premises, wait for that to synchronize to the cloud and when it sees that synchronization take place, it will then deal with the next step, all through one menu choice of cutover.”

This feeds a premium user experience in that the process becomes as simple as picking a user, starting the migration and knowing everything that’s supposed to happen will happen in a reliable and consistent way.

“It’s not just being able to do it but being able to commit to customers that you know it took place, ...and that a piece of software is watching each one of these steps execute in a reliable fashion,” he said.

Binary Tree also plans to continue its focus on the user experience. The company is exploring opportunities to integrate with many third-party tools that users already leverage – for re-assigning permissions or SharePoint Online migrations, for instance. “We would help integrate with those third-party tools and act at the orchestration level,” he said, analyzing risks and potential problems to support organizations’ planning.

“Our goal is to make these transformations as easy as possible,” Harris said, “and improve the user experience by taking on the problems no one else has wanted to take on.”

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