



PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR MANAGING MULTIPLE OFFICE 365 TENANTS

There are many reasons why you may need to deploy multiple tenants for Microsoft Office 365. How are you going to do it?



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Microsoft Office 365 dominates cloud email use among the world's largest public companies and the growth of their cloud productivity and collaboration platform is continuing at an amazing pace. Some organizations have deployed multiple Office 365 tenants to support organizational requirements and many more may need to do so in the future to support a merger, comply with a data sovereignty regulation or satisfy some other need of the business.



While deploying multiple tenants can be the solution to some problems, this scenario will also introduce other issues that IT departments are going to resolve or at least cope with. In this paper, we're going to explore some of the problems that managing multiple Office 365 tenants can cause, and some of the solutions available.

WHY HAVE MULTIPLE OFFICE 365 TENANTS?

The decision for a single organization to maintain and use multiple Office 365 tenants is not one that should be taken lightly. Microsoft has designed Office 365 so that the feature, administrative, and security boundary is at the tenant level. This means Microsoft designed Office 365 with a single organization using a single tenant in mind. If your organization is going to use multiple Office 365 tenants, you need to understand that some features and functionality are not going to work the way you might expect them to across multiple Office 365 tenants.

There are, however, several very good reasons why a single organization

may choose to deploy more than one Office 365 tenant. Some of the reasons for organizations choosing to deploy multiple Office 365 tenants include mergers and acquisitions, partnerships and alliances, data sovereignty rules, ethical walls and administrator separation.

MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

Some organizations will have to use multiple Office 365 tenants during mergers and acquisitions. IT departments often get little warning or time to prepare, but they can be required to support all kinds of complicated systems and configurations during mergers and acquisitions. As Office 365 becomes more popular, more organizations will have to run multiple Office 365 tenants within the same organization starting on day one of a merger or acquisition and lasting either indefinitely or until the tenants can be consolidated.

PARTNERSHIPS, ALLIANCES, AND JOINT VENTURES

Another use case for combining multiple Office 365 tenants into a single working

group is one that has started to come up more often; partnerships, alliances, and joint ventures. Think of the case where two or more law firms need to work together for a huge case against an automaker that may have added software to their vehicles to cheat emissions standards. Maybe several regional hospitals working together on a large-scale health campaign, or multiple manufacturing companies coming together to produce a

America or EMEA. The region that your organization's Office 365 tenant is created in is determined by the address that you enter when you setup your tenant. If you put in a U.S. address, then your tenant will be created in the North American tenant. All your users will be homed in North American data centers, and all your user's data will be homed in North America. There currently is no way for you to move your data outside of the

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very complex new product.

Whatever the reason, different organizations may need to work very closely together for a limited time on a large project that will require in-depth collaboration of hundreds of people. This situation may not call for a full migration of all involved organizations into a single Office 365 tenant, but still these separate organizations want features like a unified Global Address List, or calendar Free/Busy support.

DATA SOVEREIGNTY RULES

Data sovereignty is a legal concept that more organizations are having to deal with. IT compliance rule sets in several countries require that data must be kept within its borders for users working in those countries. A standard Office 365 tenant runs in a single region like North

region where your tenant is created.

To solve the data sovereignty requirements of Germany and China, Microsoft has worked with local partners in those countries to build separate versions of Office 365. The versions of Office 365 for Germany and China do meet the data sovereignty requirements of those countries, but organizations with employees around the world may not be willing or able to place all their users in those tenants. The only current solution for Office 365 that meets data sovereignty requirements and allows users to be homed in multiple regions is to use multiple Office 365 tenants.

ETHICAL WALLS

Another reason an organization may need to use multiple Office 365 tenants is to setup ethical walls. Industry

regulations can require organizations to limit communications between some employees. While Office 365 does have features that can enforce ethical walls within a single tenant, some organizations choose to segregate employees into separate Office 365 tenants.

While there are likely many other reasons that organizations choose to use multiple Office 365 tenants, once the decision is made these organizations need to choose which users are to be placed in which tenant.

ADMINISTRATOR SEPARATION

Administrator separation requirements can drive some organizations to multiple Office 365 tenants as well.

While role-based access control (RBAC) can allow a single organization to define different administrative roles within a single Office 365 tenant that impose access limits, the RBAC controls in Office 365 are very limited. There are no “Office 365 RBAC” controls that

combination of RBAC and web-based permissions to control administrator access. Your organization may need to use multiple Office 365 tenants to enforce administrative separation.

DECIDING WHICH USERS GO IN WHICH TENANT

Once you have decided that your organization needs two or more Office 365 tenants, you’ve got some decisions to make. Some of those decisions are going to make themselves, some will not. The reason for your decision to use multiple Office 365 tenants is going to play heavily into the decisions about which users go in which tenant.

If, for instance, your organization has data sovereignty requirements that require you to create an Office 365 tenant in Germany or China, then the decision as to which users go in which tenant is likely already made. It’s possible that your organization’s management may want to move all

A SINGLE VANITY DOMAIN NAME (@COMPANY.COM) CAN ONLY BE ASSIGNED TO A SINGLE OFFICE 365 TENANT.

span all Office 365 services. RBAC is still very much limited to each service within Office 365, and each service implements RBAC differently. The way RBAC functions within Exchange Online is not the same as the way RBAC functions within Skype for Business Online. SharePoint Online uses a

users into an Office 365 tenant that meets the data sovereignty requirements for that specific region. In most cases though, the best solution will be to move just their data into the regionalized Office 365 tenant.

If your organization needs multiple Office 365 tenants because of a merger

or acquisition, then the decision about which users belong in which tenant can be much more complex. Technical requirements like vanity domain names can be a large factor.

A single vanity domain name (@company.com) can only be assigned to a single Office 365 tenant, and this requirement extends to tenants in Germany and China. This means that

organization are split between multiple Office 365 tenants they will only see the listing of other users in their same tenant within the GAL.

Active Directory is often used for a repository of contact information including far more detail than just users' email addresses. Phone numbers, managers, direct reports, physical office address and more information

USERS WILL NOT SEE A UNIFIED GLOBAL ADDRESS LIST (GAL), THEY'LL ONLY SEE USERS FROM THEIR OWN TENANT IN THEIR GAL.

using only the default tools, the decision as to which users end up in which tenant must be made primarily based on the vanity domain names assigned to each tenant. For many organizations, this is going to mean that marketing requirements for which users have which domain name will come into conflict with the organization of teams within the organization. Some users in the sales department may need an email vanity domain name of @domain1.com while other users in the same sales department may need a vanity domain of @domain2.com.

The decision as to which users to place in which tenant will also affect the Global Address List (GAL) users see in each tenant. Exchange Online builds a GAL that lists all users in your tenant. Users often rely on the GAL for contact information for people within the organization, but if the users in your

organization are split between multiple Office 365 tenants they will only see the listing of other users in their same tenant within the GAL.

Active Directory is often used for a repository of contact information including far more detail than just users' email addresses. Phone numbers, managers, direct reports, physical office address and more information

about employees is often stored in Active Directory and primarily accessed via the GAL. When you need to split users between multiple Office 365 tenants, that functionality is lost for some users.

Calendar access is another consideration when deciding which users will be placed in which tenant. Calendars can be shared and accessed outside of your own Office 365 tenant, but that process requires additional configuration that some users may not be familiar with. If groups of users need frequent access to each other's calendars to check availability and schedule meetings, it is certainly easier to have those users homed within the same Office 365 tenant. When it is necessary for users to access this information across tenants, your help desk will need to be able to assist users to ensure this functionality is working as they expect.

When an organization makes the decision to use multiple Office 365 tenants, some of the functionality that we expect from Office 365 is going to be limited. This decision needs to be made with full understanding of how using multiple tenants will limit the collaboration features of Office 365.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK?

When moving to multiple tenants, some Office 365 features will not work between all your users. Some of the major limitations of running your organization with multiple Office 365 tenants are:

- Email domains cannot be shared across tenants
- Users in different tenants have limited email-based collaboration
- Users will not see a unified Global Address List, they'll only see users from their own tenant in their GAL
- Free/Busy calendar look ups will not work between users in different tenants without additional configuration
- Integration features may be lacking
- Directory synchronization between tenants may not work
- Changes made to user accounts may not synchronize between on-premises and multiple tenants

Running an organization with multiple Office 365 tenants can be very limiting. The advanced features and functionality that your organization is paying for in Office 365 are severely limited in this scenario. While there may be valid reasons to make the decision to use multiple Office 365 tenants, making that decision requires

planning to ensure the features your organization is paying for work.

THE FUTURE OF OFFICE 365 CUSTOMERS WITH MULTIPLE TENANTS

Office 365 is a huge service, and Microsoft has a lot of customers to keep happy. Microsoft is aware that some customers want and need the separation of multiple Office 365 tenants. Right now, Office 365 is not designed for a single organization to use multiple tenants. When features like Groups or Teams are added to Office 365 little consideration is made for how those features will work externally to the tenant in which they are enabled.

If your organization is going to use multiple Office 365 tenants, you will need help to ensure your users get the functionality they require. You are going to need a platform that augments the messaging capabilities of a multi-tenant environment.

You're going to need the ability to provide collaborative features to users who are homed in different tenants, and depending upon your situation, move users between tenants seamlessly. Trying to integrate your users and data between Office 365 tenants using only the native tools is not a wonderful experience for either end-users or administrators.

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