

Planning and Executing a Migration to Exchange Online

Your Questions Answered



By Nathan O'Bryan and Vadim Gringolts

BinaryTree
The SMART Migration Company

Presented by:

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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE MICROSOFT IT COMMUNITY

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MEET THE EXPERTS

Nathan O'Bryan (MCSM: Messaging and MVP: Office 365) and Vadim Gringolts (Binary Tree CTO) recently did a live webcast where they answered some common questions about how to plan and execute a migration into Exchange Online.

In this white paper, they have summarized the questions and answers from the webcast.



Nathan O'Bryan
MCSM: Messaging and MVP: Office 365



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The move to any cloud service means that your organization is going to be giving up some measure of control of your data.

How do I learn about the differences between Office 365 and on-premises solutions?

Nathan: Office 365 is a huge product encompassing Exchange Online, SharePoint Online, Skype for Business Online, Azure Active Directory, Office Pro Plus, and several other additional products. Keeping up with the ever-evolving technology within Office 365 is a full time job in itself.

Everyone has preferred ways in which they are more comfortable learning about technology. Some people like to watch webcasts, some people like to read articles, some people want to read books, and some people like to attend conferences. Most people will choose some mixture of the above methods, plus maybe a few others.

Whatever your preferred method of learning about new technology, I'm willing to bet there is a Microsoft MVP who has content ready for you. Check out [Microsoft's MVP website](#) and find a few MVPs who seem to have something to say about what you might be interested in. Reach out to them, ask questions. I think you'll find that most of them are willing and able to help you.

Is my data secure in Office 365?

Nathan: The move to any cloud service means that your organization is going to be giving up some measure of control of your data. Putting your data on someone else's servers located in someone else's data center makes this an inevitable side effect of moving to the cloud. There is no single thing you can do to ensure your data is secure, and really there is no way you can ever be 100 percent sure your data is safe. A move to cloud services means you have to trust your provider. The only way to establish that trust is by doing your homework.

To make this process a little easier for their customers, Microsoft has created the [Office 365 Trust Center website](#). The first step in the process of establishing a level of confidence in Office 365 should be a complete review of the information on that site relevant to your organization's concerns.

However, don't stop there. Do independent verification of the claims that Microsoft makes. Check with current Office 365 customers for their take on how their experience has been. Check with independent auditing organizations. Speak to an Office 365 deployment partner.

I am convinced that most organizations will get better overall availability from Office 365 than they will get from deploying and running their own Office servers on-premises.

Five steps for establishing confidence in Office 365:

- *Consult Microsoft's [Office 365 Trust Center website](#)*
- *Do independent verification of Microsoft's claims*
- *Talk to current Office 365 customers*
- *Consult an independent auditor to verify Microsoft's claims*
- *Speak to an Office 365 deployment partner*

How is support in Office 365?

Nathan: Just as important as trusting your cloud provider to keep your data secure, you need to trust that they will be there to resolve any service issues you might have. The advice here is much the same as it was for the question above—do the research.

One of the basic tenants of any cloud service is going to be economy of scale. These services are built to support large numbers of customers with as little manual intervention as possible. This is going to mean that your support experience is going to be less personal than if you keep these services on-premises. If that is not an acceptable trade-off to your organization, then I suggest you don't move to Office 365.

That being said, I am convinced that most organizations will get better overall availability from Office 365 than they will get from deploying and running their own Office servers on-premises. The main problem for most customers is that an outage from a cloud service feels much worse than the same outage from their on-premises deployments. This is just a fact of human nature.

What if Office 365 is not appropriate for my entire organization, but we still want to take advantage for some users?

Vadim: Microsoft defined the term "hybrid" as where you're in essence creating an integration point between the on-premises messaging infrastructure and Office 365. The "hybrid" element begins with the Active Directory integration, the federation services, which is the foundation of Office 365 transitions. If you don't get the integration right, that will be a serious concern for your overall implementation.

A move to Office 365 is certainly going to mean a change in the job duties of your average administrator.

What are the pitfalls of an Office 365 migration?

Nathan: As with any major IT migration project, there are risks to a migration into Office 365. It is possible to spend a whole lot of money and just end up with a disaster. Again, I think the best answer I can give here is do your research.

Check out your deployment partner. Get references for their work. Check their certifications. Talk to their engineers. Make sure they have a good plan going in, and a good track record of successfully completing the migration projects they start. Nobody's perfect, but it usually not too hard to identify a deployment partner that is in over their head in relation to a provider that understands your business' unique needs.

Misconception: Office 365 means that you simply outsource your entire Infrastructure.

- *Active Directory is still operating on-premises.*
- *If a company fails to establish proper interoperability between on premises and Office 365, they can suffer a lot of consequences.*

How is moving to Office 365 going to change my day-to-day job as an IT administrator?

Nathan: Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, people have been worried that some new technology is going to take their job away. Yes, sometimes that does happen. The forward march of progress has eliminated some jobs, but it has also always created new opportunities. I find that a smart, hardworking IT person is always in demand. If you want to keep up, you are going to have to constantly learn—but that is nothing new to the IT field.

A move to Office 365 is certainly going to mean a change in the job duties of your average Exchange, SharePoint, Skype for Business, etc. administrator. Once your organization is migrated to Office 365, there is no longer any need for you to perform daily backups, monitor hardware, or complete monthly patching routines. I recommend moving your focus from these simple low-level tasks to helping your organization take better advantage of the features and functionality they are paying for in Office 365. Learn how to use

S/MIME message encryption, Team Sites, or Office applications. Figure out how Office 365 Video can be used to improve your organization's on-boarding process, or how DLP can be leveraged to assist with PCI compliance.

I can promise you that Office 365 will never fail to offer new features for you to learn. Make yourself valuable to your organization by taking advantage of this opportunity and you'll always be in demand.

Am I losing my job? No, but your job will experience changes because you don't have to manage the on-premises servers. You still, however, have to manage your infrastructure, your back-end, your Active Directory, your workstations, and most notably your users.

I can promise you that Office 365 will never fail to offer new features for you to learn.

Skills IT admins should learn for Office 365:

- *Knowledge of S/MIME message encryption, Team Sites, or Office applications*
- *Understanding of how Office 365 Video can be used to improve your organization's on-boarding process*
- *Knowledge of how DLP can be leveraged to assist with PCI compliance*

How is Office 365 going to affect my users?

Nathan: A well-executed migration from on-premises servers into Office 365 should mean that your users will see very little, if any, difference in the way their applications work. Of course that does depend on what on-premises services your users are currently using. A migration from GroupWise into Exchange Online is, of course, going to mean a fairly substantial change in the way your users' messaging applications work.

Hopefully, all the changes to your users' day-to-day IT experience will be positive. The best way to ensure that is the case is to properly plan your migration project, and know what to expect each step along the way. Prior proper planning prevents poor performance.

Where do I start when planning my Office 365 migration?

Nathan: The specific details of how to plan a migration project are going to be far too varied from organization to organization for me to give a specific

My advice would be to test Office 365 before you fully commit if you think your organization's requirements might mean Office 365 is not the solution for you.

answer in this format to work for all readers. In general, the process for planning any IT project is going to be pretty much the same; understand the product you are deploying, understand the details of the migration process, develop a good migration plan, test your plan, and have someone involved who is prepared to deal with unexpected occurrences.

I think the best place to start with an Office 365 migration project is finding a good deployment partner to guide you through the transition. If your organization chooses to do the migration using only internal resources, make sure you have the experience to deal with anything unexpected that might come up.

What if we find out Office 365 is not a good fit for our organization?

Nathan: Personally, I think Office 365 is a great offering that will be a great service for many organizations. However, I am sure there are organizations out there that will find Office 365 does not meet their requirements as well as an on-premises deployment.

My advice would be to test Office 365 before you fully commit. Maybe a hybrid deployment will be more appropriate, moving some users or services to Office 365, while keeping other hosted on-premises.

Whatever ends up being the best solution for you, it's best to find out before you are fully committed. A good test plan will be invaluable in finding this out.

If you find yourself in a position where your origination has fully completed a migration into Office 365, off-boarding back to on-premises solutions will be fairly complex. In these cases, I would recommend engaging a partner with experience in situations similar to your own.

How long does an Office 365 migration take?

Nathan: There is no single right answer to this question. I have done migrations over a weekend, and I have done migrations that have taken more than a year to complete. The size of your organization and the complexity of your migration plan are going to be the main deciding factors over how long your organization's migration will take.

If you have a good plan, and a process to update that plan if anything unexpected happens, then you'll be in a much better position to successfully complete your migration.

What is important is that you have a good migration plan before you start. If you have a good plan, and a process to update that plan if anything unexpected happens, then you'll be in a much better position to successfully complete your migration than if you just "go for it" without doing the legwork before you start. Consider integration, user transition and data transition in your migration.

Three critical elements of Office 365 migration:

- ***Integration:*** Establish interoperability between on premises infrastructure and Office 365
- ***User Transition:*** Your #1 goal is to move users (gradually or simultaneously)
- ***Data Transition:*** Where will my data go? Active mailboxes and archive mailboxes.

Vadim: You can move pretty quickly if you are moving from Exchange 2007, 2010 or 2013. If you are on outdated legacy environments, the move is going to take more time to allow for preparation of your environment.

You also have to make sure that your Active Directory infrastructure is ready for the move.

Make sure that as you move, you are able to support your users in the new environment. The speed at which your migration moves should always be tempered by your users' needs in the new environment.

What is the hardest part of an Office 365 migration?

Vadim: There is a temptation to not plan appropriately and to take shortcuts. Your #1 decision is "Can I do this myself or do I need to engage another party?" Microsoft has made a huge investment in onboarding via the FastTrack program and the Onboarding Center, and there are also a great deal of Certified Partners that the Onboarding Center can recommend.

Once you move your users, you need to give them their content. Once the data is in the cloud, it needs to be accessed by the user via their cached mailbox. Make sure you are selecting the right way of moving

Make sure the technology you have selected will not subject the user to a great deal of pain of waiting for an OST rebuild.

the data and what data to move to the cloud. Make sure the technology you have selected will not subject the user to a great deal of pain of waiting for an OST rebuild.

Unless you have a small organization or know a lot about Office 365, it will be difficult and time-consuming to migrate your users on your own. ■

Contact Us

Hopefully you've found something in this white paper that will be of assistance to you in your upcoming migration to Office 365. If you have other questions, feel free to reach out to:

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About Binary Tree

Binary Tree is a singularly focused global provider of migration software and solutions for Lotus Notes, Microsoft Exchange, Active Directory, and Windows Server environments. Since 1993, Binary Tree has enabled more than 6,000 customers to migrate more than 35 million email users, and facilitated some of the most complex migrations on the planet. Its software solutions are available for migrating from Exchange 2003/2007/2010/2013 and Lotus Notes to on-premises and online versions of Microsoft Exchange, as well as migrations of Active Directory and Windows Server environments. Binary Tree is a Microsoft Gold Messaging Partner, an IBM Advanced Business Partner, and is one of Microsoft's preferred vendors for migrating to Microsoft Office 365. The Company is headquartered outside of New York City with offices in Hong Kong, London, Paris, Stockholm and Sydney. For more information, visit us at www.binarytree.com.