How to Approach Migrating Exchange Public Folders to Office 365 Groups

About this paper

A new destination is now available for your Exchange on-premises public folders—Office 365 Groups. In this paper, we highlight the benefits of using Office 365 Groups, why and when you should consider Groups as a destination for public folders, and how to prepare and migrate your public folders to Groups.

Binary Tree is uniquely qualified to help with this topic, as our E2E Complete platform is the first commercially available, enterprise-grade migration software that lets you drag-and-drop content from legacy on-premises public folders in Exchange 2003+ to Office 365 Groups. We've created a platform that presents tremendous value to customers over other competing migration methods. Many customers may not yet realize the value of this feature, as the capability to migrate public folders to an Office 365 Group was not an available migration endpoint before the E2E Complete platform. Thus, the E2E Complete suite is a catalyst to help drive a successful Office 365 migration by helping you mitigate risk and reduce costs while fully embracing modern collaboration tools from Microsoft.

What are Office 365 Groups?

Microsoft created Groups to help facilitate communication within the enterprise by providing a single place to collaborate with conversations, events, and files. A Group (Figure 1) is an easy way to aggregate the emails, calendar appointments, documents, and instant messages that employees create. You can think of a Group as the foundation of all team-based corporate collaboration, as it serves to provide a single identity and permission set.
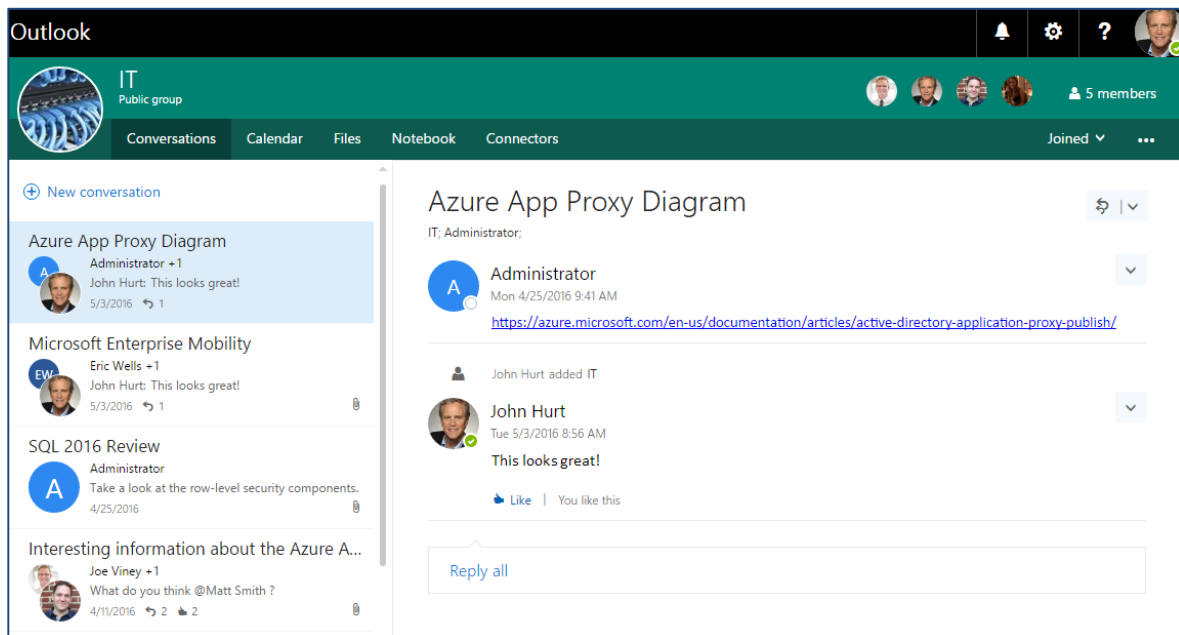

Figure 1. Sample home page of an Office 365 group

Newly created Groups provide an inbox for a central repository of email around a project, group-calendaring functionality, a document repository in OneDrive for Business, and a shared OneNote notebook. One of the great features of Groups is that they are based on a self-service model and allow users to freely create or join automatically. This means that a user who is new to a project can join a Group and catch up on all the historical information that has been shared from other team members to date.

The possibilities of where an Office 365 Group could help teams come together and solve problems are endless. For example, teams can use them to push out an RFP response, solve a customer problem, create sales or marketing plans, design a new product feature, or even schedule team events. Traditionally, the use of a SharePoint team site was a great answer to this business need. Soon, an Office 365 Group will provide a full-featured SharePoint site (Figure 2) to support the team's file repository needs while providing all the additional historical collaboration features.
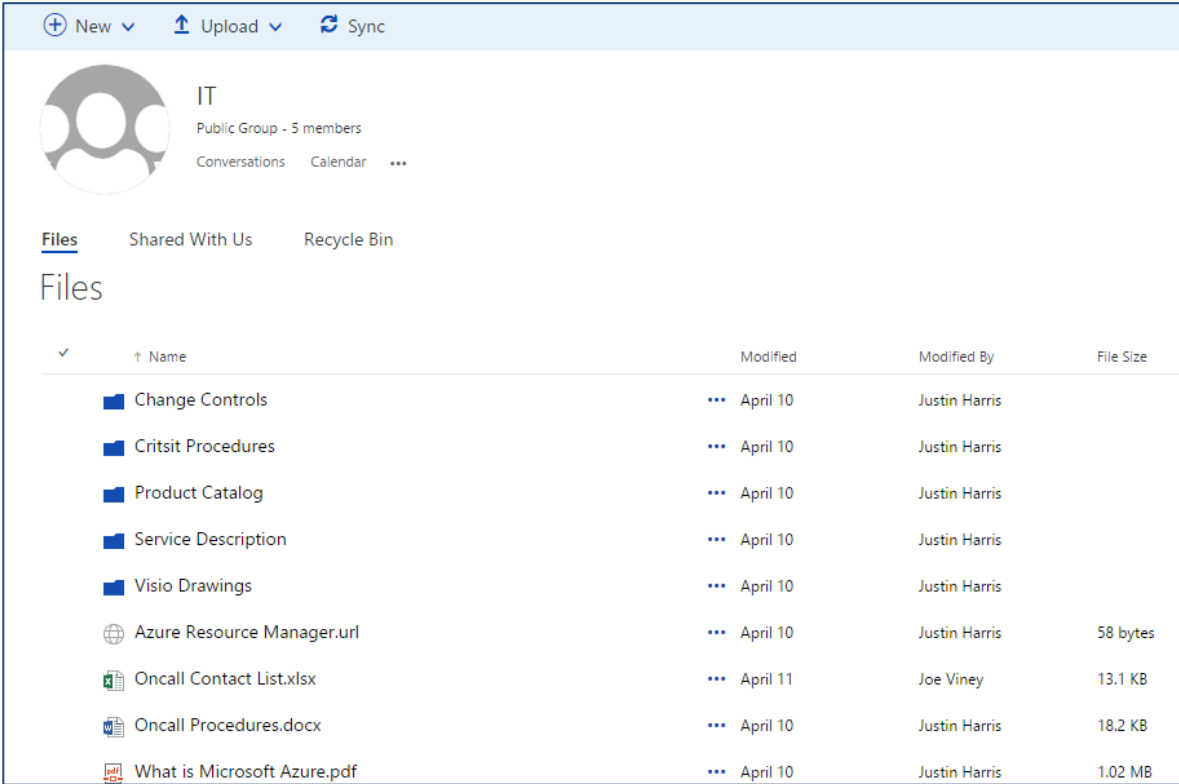

Figure 2. A SharePoint file repository within an Office 365 Group

And the power of Groups continues to evolve. For example, Microsoft recently introduced the Dynamics CRM connector for Groups, which helps you stay on top of the tasks on your CRM records within the Groups experience in Outlook. They also plan to integrate Yammer and Delve. Finally, you can use Office 365 Connectors to bring third-party data typically found in SaaS applications (like Twitter) right into a Group.

Why move to Office 365 Groups?

Office 365 Groups are a modern, powerful way to collaborate with friends, family, and colleagues. They give you all the tools you need to collaborate—from a SharePoint file repository to a mobile app so you can stay up-do-date on the go. By using Groups, you'll gain these benefits:

- Drive even more value for your existing Office 365 spend

- Light up dynamic collaboration features across desktop and mobile in ways that public folders don't allow

- Reduce the amount of time teams waste trying to find previously created content, such as before they joined the company

- Avoid wasting time switching between standalone tools like email and file shares

- Use the mobile app to work even on the go

- Reduce capex costs that traditionally come with legacy on-premises public folders

And since the E2E Complete platform from Binary Tree makes it so easy to migrate to Groups, you'll expend minimal cost and effort to gain these benefits.

Are you ready to migrate to Office 365 Groups?

Most of your existing public folders are likely great candidates to migrate to Office 365 Groups. You can start with the assumption that all of your public folders (and distribution groups) can be migrated to Groups. Then you just need to consider if any of your public folders use features that only a public folder or SharePoint can provide. Also, note that your Office 365 users will need Outlook 2016 or Outlook on the web to have the full first-party experience, which are the biggest gotchas that can slow adoption.

Here's a quick breakdown of features that migrate easily, new features you gain in Groups, and features that don't migrate as easily.

Features that migrate easily
A public folder is a good candidate to migrate to an Office 365 Group if it:

- Represents a department, team, project, or other group who collaborate
- Has a supporting file share, SharePoint document library, or Yammer network
- Is mail-enabled
- Contains email, posts, and calendar items
- Has a large member size
- Has a high transaction rate (replies, number of thread IDs) of activity within folder
- Contains a large number of calendar appointments
- Has a large quota requirement
- Has high attachment rates (~30%)

- Enforces a naming policy (SMTP and alias)

New features you gain

When you move a public folder to a Group, you gain these features:

- Desired extensibility through the Microsoft Graph REST API
- Feature-rich mobile access across phones and tablets
- Dynamic membership through the use of Azure AD Premium
- Ability to bring in third-party data from SaaS applications (like Twitter hashtags)
- Seamless integration of other Office 365 workloads

Features that don't migrate easily

Public folders with these features are not good candidates to migrate:

- Contact, journal, and task message class data
- Bi-directional synchronization requirements
- Custom views
- Custom forms
- Folder Assistant rules

Key takeaways

- Office 365 Groups give teams a single place to collaborate with conversations, events, and files

- Many or all of your existing Public Folders are likely great candidates to migrate to Office 365 Groups

- You'll need to upgrade your Office 365 users to Outlook 2016 before they can take advantage of Office 365 Groups

- The E2E Complete platform from Binary Tree is the first tool that lets you easily drag-and-drop your public folders into Office 365 Groups

About Binary Tree

Binary Tree provides organizations with the most direct and predictable path to a successful technology transformation. We offer software and services to integrate and migrate corporate email, directory and server environments. Our technology, methodology and expertise is uniquely suited to provide fast and manageable migrations, with low risk, little to no user downtime, and adapted to each customer's environment and requirements. Since 1993, Binary Tree has enabled thousands of enterprise customers to migrate more than 35 million users, including 5 million users to Office 365 alone, and facilitated some of the most complex technology transformations on the planet. Binary Tree is a Microsoft Gold Partner and a globally preferred vendor for Microsoft Office 365 migrations and solutions. 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.

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