Microsoft Office365 Exchange Pilot Project Summary

Overview

The Office365 Exchange pilot focused on testing the feasibility of using the Office365 (A2) Exchange services for UCI mail and calendaring needs. In addition, the pilot tested the feasibility of Microsoft’s optional hybrid configuration which synchronizes the cloud Exchange environments with UCI’s local Exchange environment to allow for cross-premises calendaring functionality.

The overall results of the pilot project revealed that Office365 Exchange services could fulfill all expected functionality provided by Local Exchange, with a few recommendations to maintain service quality.

The hybrid approach of having users split between the cloud and on-prem Exchange should be avoided to reduce user and support issues discovered to be present in the hybrid configuration. Moving all of the Exchange community to Office365 Exchange services would provide the best user experience, would reduce support requirements, and would increase overall value of O365 by reducing the costs of providing an on-premises hosted Exchange service.

The scope of supported suggested desktop clients used with Office365 Exchange should be limited to improve the user experience and to reduce support requirements. Microsoft Outlook 2013 should be recommended as the preferred client for the Windows platform.

While performance is not as optimal as on the Windows platform, Office 2011 and the native Mail, Calendar and Contacts program bundled with OSX should be the supported suggested clients for Mac users.

Outlook Web App (OWA) should be an alternative suggested interface for all systems (Windows, OSX and *nix).

Departments involved in pilot.

The pilot involved 117 users across 8 departments with an additional 345 users moved to Office365 Exchange as part of Paul Merage School of Business mass-adoption for their student and staff population. In total, UCI’s Office365 Exchange environment hosted 461 users at the end of the pilot testing. The students and staff within the Paul Merage School of Business have been excluded from the totals represented in this summary.
Below is a list of the departments who participated the Office365 Exchange pilot program, along with the count of users from each department who participated.

Arts (1)
Athletics (5)
Humanities (2)
CALIT2 (24)
Library (16)
Office of Information Technology (62)
Student Affairs (6)
Student Life and Leadership (1)
Total (117)

Main points of advantage observed from the pilot.

1. Plan A2 Services offered at no charge to UCI.
2. Office365 Exchange is Exchange 2013 (most current version of Exchange).
3. Individual mailbox storage currently offered at 50GB (recently increased from 25GB).
4. Redundancy of service across primary and secondary data centers located in the US. This is in comparison to OIT’s current Exchange environment which is located in a single-location (OIT DC).
5. Advanced Administrative Controls for e-discovery functions. Most noteworthy is the ability to delegate control of e-discovery to security and compliance personnel.
6. Speed tests conducted over a 1-week period examined the times of delivery to both cloud and on-prem exchange accounts. The results of the speed tests showed consistent delivery to both locations under 1 minute. Although initially reported to be of concern to some users, the speed of mail delivery did not present substantial issues for the pilot community.

Main points of irritation observed from the pilot.

1. While calendaring between the on-premise Exchange and O365 works fairly well, the process of establishing calendar sharing and coordinating across the two environments proves to be challenging for some.
2. Microsoft has proven to make unannounced changes, which have caused unexpected issues at times with support.

3. Microsoft’s published service status in the portal has not always reported experienced issues. This portal serves as a main communication conduit to OIT regarding service status for Office365 services. Piloting members of the services have reported confirmed service issues not reported in the O365 portal.

4. Microsoft Premier Support with TAM engagement is a dependency to obtaining responsive support on reported issues, which obligates OIT to the annual cost of Premier support.

5. The highest number of reported issues were experienced using OSX (Mac Mail, Calendar, or Outlook 2011). Many of the comments related to these reports cite the lack of refinement expected from the Outlook client for Mac. Microsoft has reported that the next version of Outlook for Mac will be greatly improved and much closer to the Windows client.

Administrative Controls for Office365 Exchange

Office365 offers flexibility in options for administration. The same controls used to administer local Exchange can be used to administer Office365. In addition, accounts can be administered through the provided web portal or via scripts that use Powershell cmdlets to do bulk activities like provisioning, moving or dismissing multiple accounts.

User Survey Data

As part of the pilot project, a survey was conducted to help measure several high-level data points. The following data points were measured as part of the survey:

- Type of user (Student, Staff, Faculty)
- Associated Department
- Types of clients used for email and calendar
- Performance experience for each used client
- Specific issues encountered
- Overall performance of Office365 for email and calendar
The survey results for overall satisfaction illustrate that 60% of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the service while piloting Office365. 29% rated their overall satisfaction as indifferent, leaving only 11% of participants as dissatisfied with the service.

The clients providing the most ease of use were Windows Outlook 2010/2013 and the native iOS Email and Calendar clients.

Although the overall number was low, the poor performer of the survey was Outlook Web App (OWA) with varying levels of poor rating across IE, Firefox and Chrome browsers. Due to the low number of reports, there are no specifics about the types of issues experienced by those participating in the survey.

**Known Issues**

The following is a list of items that have been classified as known issues that have been verified by Microsoft to be ‘as-expected’ behaviors with no intent to provide resolutions for at this time.

- A user may experience some delays (in the realm of 10-20 seconds) when opening multiple calendars on-premises. This is due to the need to collect and cache the individual calendar information from each calendar being accessed.
- Some Mobile devices will not auto-configure as part of the transport process of moving a user from local Exchange to Office365. Mobile device owners will need to manually reconfigure their devices for Office365 using the instructions provided in the 'Configuration Details' section.
- Apple’s OS X mail clients will not auto-configure as part of the transport process of moving a user from local Exchange to Office365. OS X mail clients will need to manually reconfigure their devices for Office365.
• Transporting to Office365 will dismiss any previously assigned calendar permissions. Individuals are required to reestablish special calendar permissions for individuals after transport to the cloud.

• Resource calendars must remain located in the same environment (local exchange or office365) as the owner of the resource.