

Hosted Email Servers

A Great 1st Step into the Cloud

Taking off into the cloud can be intimidating for many businesses – and for good reason. Along with the many benefits, there are real limitations and pitfalls that must be addressed or the results can be disappointing. If diving in all at once exceeds the limits of risk-adverse executives, there is a good alternative. Converting to a hosted email server is an excellent first step. It offers clear, visible advantages, from better collaboration and increased efficiency to more robust security and lower cost. The key is to do it right. It should start with a detailed implementation plan that addresses the commonly encountered hurdles and have a controllable phase-in that includes helpdesk support for users. This article outlines the key considerations a business should address when moving into the cloud with a hosted email server.

The Case for the Cloud

A Forrester Research study found that 83% of employees in companies surveyed use email to interact with coworkers, customers and others, establishing it as the number-one collaboration tool by nearly a two-to-one margin. Making this essential business tool as dependable, efficient, secure and cost-effective as possible is (or should be) a top priority for IT staffs and the C-suite. Moving email servers to the cloud by using a hosted solution can effectively address all of these issues.

- Cloud-based email servers have highly reliable, redundant systems that are not prone to interruptions from on-premise equipment failures, system problems, power outages, sabotage and an array of other concerns.
- Outsourcing the management and maintenance of email servers enables IT, administrative and others staffs to focus on core business issues.
- Hosted email servers have extremely high security with multiple levels of safeguards to avoid threats. In addition, they reside in the cloud, rather than in a facility that can be breached.
- Significant direct and indirect expenses can be avoided by using a cloud-based email server. The most obvious costs include server purchases, software licensing, upgrades and much more. Less visible costs are management time, support, space allocation, power usage and more. These not only affect IT, but other departments, as well.

It is the rare businesses that could not benefit from a cloud-based email server solution.

How Does Hosted Email Work?

The difference between premise-based email and cloud-based or hosted email is essentially where the email servers, software and management services are located. Companies with premise-based email have the physical email servers (and necessary software, like Microsoft Exchange) in their facilities.



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All emails reach the servers and exit through an Internet connection. The emails are then routed to appropriate recipients, whether they are onsite, in a different facility or on a mobile device. All processing happens on the company side of the Internet connection. If that Internet connection or the server goes down, all email stops.

With hosted email, the servers are located in the cloud. This means that a service provider maintains the physical servers in their facilities, along with the software applications (like Microsoft Exchange). All of a company's incoming emails go through an allocated server via the hosting provider's Internet connections. The emails are then processed (screened for malware, spam, etc.) and routed to each recipient through their own separate Internet connection. Since all the email management functions reside in the cloud, where there is extensive backup and security, email outages are very infrequent. Even if the company's primary Internet connection is lost, each user can utilize an alternative Internet connection to get and send email.

Another major difference is how the email is managed. With premise-based email servers, all of the provisioning, installation, upgrades, maintenance, security, troubleshooting and more is the responsibility of the company – usually the IT staff or outsourced IT vendor. A hosted email provider delivers all these services and more. Both the physical operation and management of the

email, its servers and software is outsourced, but the company has a large degree of control from its facilities and mobile devices.

Key Features & Benefits

The description of hosted email itself highlights some of the major advantages of cloud-based servers, software and management. Following are other key benefits:

Reliability:

- **Premise-Based Outages** – 35% of email outages come as a result of server failure. 33% of major in-house email outages leave staff without email for more than 24 hours. There are many reasons why an on-premise email server can go down. These include power outages, equipment failure, Internet interruption, software issues, malware, sabotage, human error, natural disasters and more. Hosted email virtually eliminates all of these possibilities.
- **Backup** – An alarmingly high percentage of premise-based emails are not adequately backed up. Hosted email has ultra-reliable, redundant back-ups.
- **Pipeline Limitations** – Premise-based email all comes into a company through its Internet connection. This includes all the data within the emails, attachments and spam that is yet to be filtered. This can easily bog down the connection and email



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server, delaying or even losing vital communications. Hosted email eliminates this concern because users do not actually download the data. They only view it on the cloud-based server. Only selected data, such as key attachments, are actually downloaded. In addition, spam is filtered in the cloud, not in the company.

- **Applications** – Many companies lag behind the current versions of email software, like Microsoft Exchange – often multiple versions behind. Hosted email providers stay current with recent versions, avoiding possible limitation and compatibility issues.

Efficiency:

- **Work Anywhere, Anytime** – Get full access to all email folders, contacts, calendars and files from any enabled device.
- **Stay Current** – Any changes to emails, contacts, calendar and files are immediately applied and accessible from any location and in any medium.
- **Stay Connected** – Contacts, calendar, notes, emails and task lists can be accessed on any mobile platform – Android, iPhone, Windows Phone 7, BlackBerry and other smartphones and tablets.

Productivity:

- **Flexible Disk Space** – Hosted mailboxes of varying sizes can be maintained to accommodate needs and minimize cost.

- **Scalability** – To add users and space to premise-based email, companies must add hardware and software – or purchase more than they need during provisioning to allow for expansion. With hosted email, adding or removing users and space is easy and incremental, saving cost and resources.
- **Secure, Easy Collaboration** – With co-workers, customers and suppliers.
- **Meeting Scheduling** – Quick, easy and efficient scheduling with co-workers by viewing everyone's calendar and free times.
- **Feature Rich** – View, add, change and delete appointments on other users' calendars.
- **Avoid Scheduling Conflicts** – Coordinate schedules and resources like meeting rooms, equipment, etc.
- **Share Files, Emails, Contacts and Calendars** – Throughout the organization, department or project.
- **Reduce Spam** – Filter out unwanted emails before they get to company mailboxes, saving time, aggravation and bandwidth.

Cost Savings:

- **Licensing** – Companies with premise-based email must purchase an individual license for each user. If the number of users decreases, the company has wasted the cost of those licenses. With hosted email, users can come and go, and the cost goes up or down accordingly.



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- **Software Updates** – Companies with premise-based email must purchase new licenses whenever a major new version is released. Hosted email providers offer perpetual subscriptions that include these updates to ensure up-to-date software. Osterman Research estimated the cost of migrating to Exchange 2007 for a 5,000 user company to reach up to \$244 each. This is considerably more than using a hosted email provider. The high cost of premise-based upgrading also deters many companies from staying current, which means their older versions may not have full or any support. Microsoft Exchange 2003 support is scheduled to end 4/8/2014.
- **Backup Software & Staff Time** – Far too many companies do not back up their email adequately. This requires onsite storage cost and staff time. Back-ups happen automatically with hosted email, and companies pay only for the space they use.
- **Backup Media** – A Yankee Group survey revealed that the lifetime failure rate for onsite backup tapes is 50%. Hosted email eliminates the cost of tapes and other backup media, plus the devastating consequences of lost data due to media failures.
- **Anti-Virus Software & Staff Time** – Email management, including malware and virus software, are provided with hosted email.

- **Email Security Management** – This cost is part of hosted email fees.
- **Email Restoration** – Restoring backed-up email is faster and easier than from local media.

Security:

- **Enterprise Managed Firewall** – Premise-based email servers often have woefully inadequate security. Hosted services have continuous screening & intrusion detection.
- **Virus Protection** – Hosted email offers automatic virus checking of all inbound and outbound emails and their attachments. This helps eliminate threats from email – the #1 risk for spreading computer viruses.
- **Peace of Mind** – Companies can work with confidence and fully utilize capabilities knowing the data center is secure.
- **Leading Edge Precautions** – Hosted email server security stays as current as possible with the latest malware and threats.

How to Get to the Cloud

There are many factors to take into account when moving to hosted, cloud-based email. Cost, the reliability of the provider, available features and capabilities are just a few. If a company does not have a qualified, experienced IT expert on staff, it is a very good idea to work with professionals. The additional cost is negligible compared to the savings



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and benefits. Following are some key issues to consider:

- Number of Users
- Number of Locations
- Preferred Email Platform
- Storage Space Requirements
- Data Migration Technical Issues
- Backup Features
- Security
- Scalability and Flexibility
- Software Updating Policy
- Cost
- Many Other Factors

Most importantly, make a good plan that is realistic and includes adequate support for users. They cannot afford to lose access to their email.

Summary

Hosted, cloud-based email offers so many advantages that it is hard to make a case for not taking the plunge. Perhaps the biggest objection is fear of losing control of and access to email if it is hosted in the cloud. The reality is that in the vast majority of cases up-time and access will be far greater than with premise-based email hosting – up to 100 times better. The real cost savings, efficiency, security, reliability, effective utilization of IT and other staff make a compelling case. Talk to a pro and get your head in the clouds.

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