

The Paradox of Microsoft Office365 Mailbox Backup





Executive Summary

With the wider adoption of Microsoft Office 365, it becomes a perception that backup of their Office application data is no longer necessary as it now resides on the Azure platform operated by Microsoft. While this statement is partially correct, there are certain aspects in data integrity and security that can only be addressed with a robust solution.

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Microsoft Office365 - Data Integrity and Security

With the emergence of Office 365, Microsoft has offered a versatile SaaS model and evolved from the earlier generation ASP model that relied on third party providers to provide similar Office application on a pay-as-you-go basis. Using Office 365, however, also means your customers' sensitive data is now stored in the Azure Blob storage infrastructure. This deviates from the old ASP model in which you can still store your customers' data in your own location.

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The Five Reasons Your Customers Need to Back Up their Microsoft Office 365 Mailbox Data

3.1 Service Availability

While Microsoft does not publicize their service availability or service commitment as most data center or telco will do, we can always check their SLA in terms of when they will compensate with service credit when there is service downtime as a proxy of their target availability.

For most services offered via Office 365, customers will be eligible for service credit when the availability falls below 99.9% (which translates to an estimated downtime of 31,536 seconds, or ~9 hours a year or less than 1 hour a month). This figure seems to be fine but when you compare a target 99.999% for a typical telco grade service (target downtime of 315 seconds, or ~5 minutes a year), or that of a global data center at 99.99999% (target downtime of ~3 seconds a year), this availability is appalling and your customers will need to have a backup solution to protect the availability of not only their data, but also their business.

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3.2 Human Error

While Microsoft Office 365 offers a robust platform that customers can access their data anywhere, there is one final culprit of data corruption organizations cannot avoid, viz. human error.

3.2.1 Accidental/Intentional Data Deletion

Business data is the fabric of every business. In the daily operation, it is unavoidable that an email got deleted. With the current retention and purge policy, organizations are relying on their staff to control when the data will be purged permanently. While we trusted our staff to work in good faith, it is unavoidable that human error occurs and live data got purged by accident, let alone the possibility of IT sabotage where employees delete critical corporate data intentionally. With a third party backup solution, your customers' data will be secured in an offsite location that can only be retrieved by authorized personnel.

3.2.2 Document Version Control

While Office 365 already instigates version control in the offering, it does not prevent accidental/intentional data deletion as mentioned above. It is therefore imperative that a separate backup system is in place to ensure data integrity in your customers' organization.

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3.3 Litigation Hold is for archiving rather than backup

The litigation hold function is available in the high-end Office 365 Enterprise plans¹ for customers who are serious about their Office 365 data. It leads to an opinion that backup is not necessary because all mail items can be held indefinitely. However, litigation hold is fundamentally an archiving solution. It only archives user's mail items in the Recoverable Items folder with a limited storage of 30GB² and doesn't preserve the mailbox folder structure. More importantly, it is tedious and complex to restore email that's being held on litigation hold.

You need to educate your customers about the difference between archiving and backup – archiving provides long-term data retention that is no longer actively used, whereas backup software makes a copy of production data and keeps it available so that the Point-in-Time copy can be swiftly returned to production when needed. Litigation hold is useful as an archiving feature for organizations to meet legal compliance. But if they need to quickly restore data that is lost due to accidental or malicious deletion, they should choose the right tool for the job – third-party backup and recovery software.

¹ <https://products.office.com/en-us/business/office-365-enterprise-e3-business-software>

² [https://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/dn743673\(v=exchg.160\).aspx](https://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/dn743673(v=exchg.160).aspx)

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3.4 Functions of Recovery

While Office 365 provides deleted item recovery, its functions are limited. The native item-level recovery only protects organizations against deleting items such as emails, but it does not allow recovery of a corrupted folder or mailbox. Point-in-Time restoration is also out of the scope of the Office 365 Exchange service³. In case your customers' mailbox data is damaged because of unexpected breaches, they would not be able to recover the emails or mailbox to an earlier point in time.

When your customers recover from the Office 365 backup using Ahsay, they will be presented by a navigable explorer screen so they can quickly retrieve the entire mailbox or specific items such as emails, contacts, and calendars from any point in time they were backed up. This is especially important because the whole value of data restore is to perform this in a timely manner according to their needs.

3.5 Speed of Recovery

While the cloud platform offers flexibility and scalability, the bottleneck of data transfer resides in the Internet bandwidth. When your customers' data are backed up locally using the Ahsay Office 365 solution, they will be able to reduce the time to recover their data. This is especially critical when your customers are performing data restore and they need to recover potentially a large amount of data in a short period of time.

³ [https://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/dn440734\(v=exchg.150\).aspx](https://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/dn440734(v=exchg.150).aspx)

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4. Conclusion

It is a misconception that once email data resides in the cloud there is no need to back it up. Organizations cannot risk all of their mailbox data being in the hands of one provider. In the event of Office 365 service outage or data loss caused by human errors or malicious activities, your customers are helpless in retrieving any of the business critical mailbox data by using Office 365's limited recovery functions.

With the Office 365 Exchange Online mailbox backup solution, Ahsay gives your customers absolute peace of mind by ensuring the data integrity and security, as well as empowering them to take full control of their own mailbox data. Visit our website (www.ahsay.com) to find out more.