



Expert guide to Office 365: New features, capabilities and migration tips

There's been a lot of hype around the new features of Office 365, but is it right for your Exchange environment? This expert e-guide from SearchExchange.com explains the reasons to be excited about Office 365. Find out about the features of this version of Office, including real-time document editing and screen sharing. Learn how you can manage Exchange Online from the ECP, which is accessed through an Outlook Web App (OWA) connection. Plus, discover two different migration processes to help smooth the transition to Office 365.

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Office 365: Convergence in the cloud

If it's also important to find a hosting provider that's also specializes in software, you might want to look at Microsoft's prevailing Office 365. Segmented for two major product lines -- one for small businesses and one for enterprises, Office 365 has a single per-user cost for traditional email via Exchange Server and Outlook. The product also includes document collaboration via SharePoint.

But Office 365's strength is that it seamlessly integrates these technologies -- email and collaboration -- with unified communications. Office 365's presence features allows a team to see who is available at a specific time and schedule meetings using video, real-time document editing and screen sharing. Office 2010 improvements are central to consolidating these features into one seamless package.

In addition to the user experience, Office 365 gives administrators more cohesive control over previously segmented and niche technologies -- Exchange Server, SharePoint and Unified Communications (now in the form of Microsoft Lync). Admins can manage Office 365 via the Web; the enterprise version allows for greater control than the small business version.

Companies looking to offload the administrative complexity and risk of failure to someone else might want to seriously consider Office 365. Eliminating the burden of responsibility for backups, messaging security and some elements of regulatory compliance can be a great relief to an already overworked IT administrator.

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Why you should be excited about Office 365

Companies using Microsoft's Business Productivity Online Suite should be eager to move to Office 365. The ability to combine capabilities of Exchange 2010 SP1, SharePoint 2010 and Lync 2010 could dramatically improve the way they do business. Not only is it a no-brainer for existing customers, but it may make fiscal sense for companies seeking an all-in-one hosted communication and collaboration setup.

Office 365 -- at this point -- is mostly end-user oriented. But let's look at how Office 365, and more specifically Exchange Online, can change an administrator's job.

Exchange Online and the Exchange Control Panel

Typically, admins managed Exchange on-premise via the Exchange Management Console (EMC) and Exchange Management Shell (EMS). In Exchange 2010 RTM, a new way to manage Exchange was released in the form of the Exchange Control Panel (ECP). At the time, it had limited functionality. With the introduction of Exchange 2010 SP1, the ECP's functionality was expanded. However, some admins still wondered why they would use the ECP to manage Exchange on-premise when they still had the EMS and EMC; now we know. In Office 365, admins can manage Exchange Online from the ECP, which is accessed through an Outlook Web App (OWA) connection.

When you first log into Office 365 as an admin, you can't do very much. You can create users and work with security groups and domains, but that's about it (Figure 1).

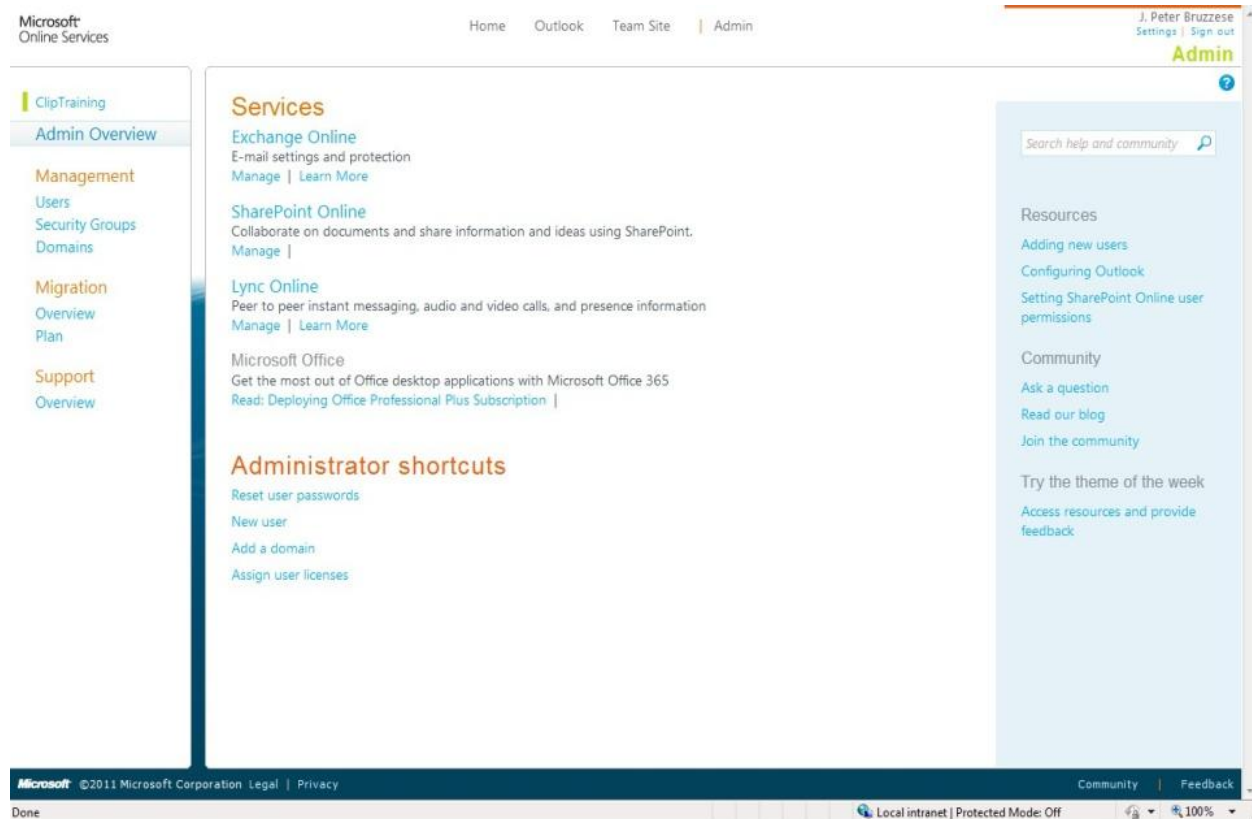


Figure 1: A screenshot of the Admin Overview page in Office 365.

The Exchange Control Panel in Office 365 gives you a greater level of control. For example, you can now create transport rules through the ECP. You also can configure roles, role groups and Forefront Online Protection for Exchange (FOPE) settings (Figure 2).

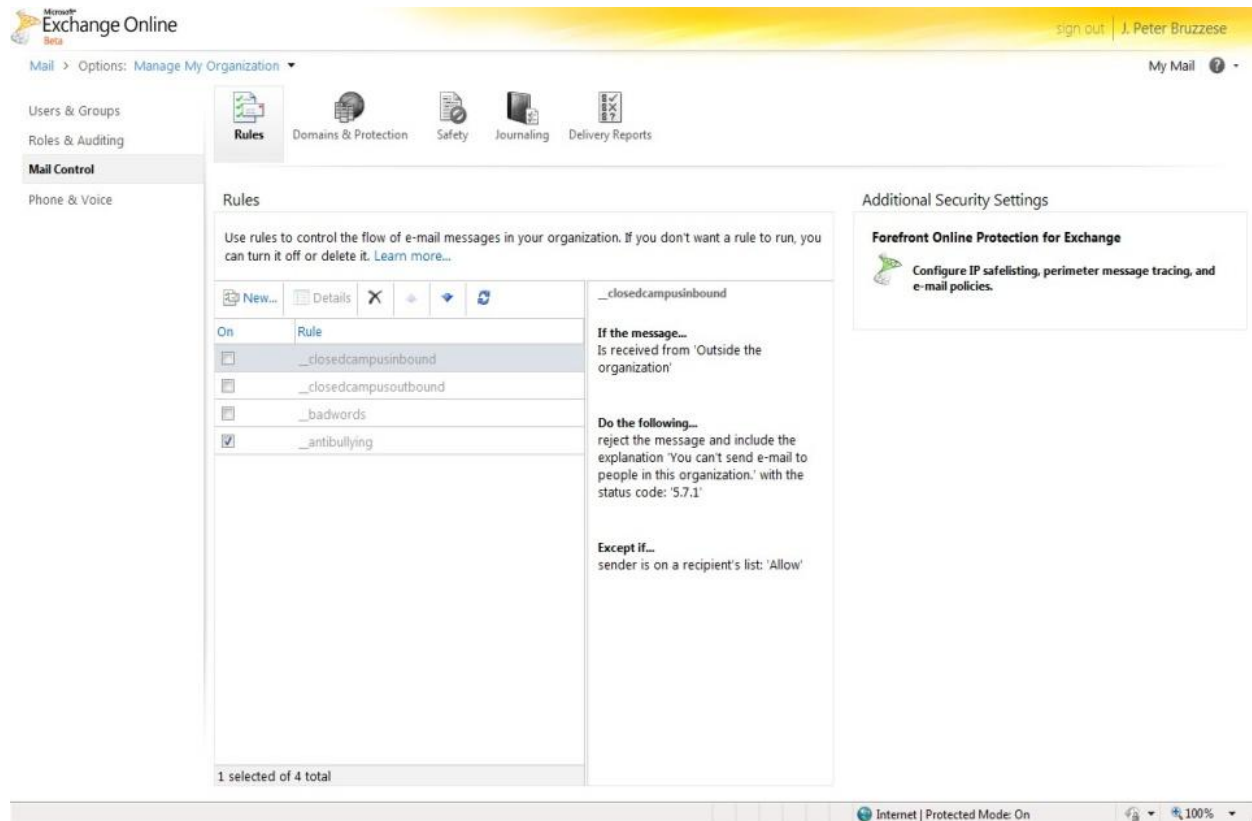


Figure 2: The Exchange Control Panel will help admins manage their Office 365 environments.

In my opinion, the familiarity of the ECP, combined with its flexibility and ease-of-use is a huge value-add for Office 365 over other hosted solutions -- Exchange or otherwise.

Exchange Online coexistence options

Not all companies are ready to dive right into a hosted environment. Depending on your comfort level, you can run a hybrid/coexistence environment. And there are various levels to choose from in this option: simple coexistence or rich coexistence.

- A simple coexistence environment limits the amount of mailbox delegation available to users. Additionally, users in one environment -- on-premise or Exchange Online -- cannot view the free/busy information of users in the other environment.

- A rich coexistence scenario is more robust overall and will eliminate the mailbox delegation issue and will also share free/busy info.

If you implement a rich coexistence environment, you'll also be able to move mailboxes seamlessly between on-premise deployment and the cloud. You can also use on-premise Active Directory and Exchange management tools to manage **all** mailboxes, whether on-premise or in the cloud.

Migration options and deployment

Once you've decided to make the switch to Office 365, there are two different migrations processes depending on which platform you're running. There is the *Exchange migration plan* and the *IMAP migration plan*. If you choose the Exchange migration plan, you can migrate an existing Exchange 2003, Exchange 2007 or Exchange 2010 environment to Office 365. This option is also called a "simple Exchange migration" or a "cutover migration" because you move all on-premise applications. You should use the IMAP migration plan if you need to migrate IMAP-enabled servers, including Exchange 5.5 and Exchange Server 2000, to Office 365 (Figure 3).

The screenshot shows the Microsoft Office 365 Admin Center interface. At the top, there are navigation links for Home, Outlook, Team Site, and Admin. The user is identified as J. Peter Bruzzese with an Admin role. A left-hand navigation menu includes sections for ClipTraining, Admin Overview, Management (Users, Security Groups, Domains), Migration (Overview, Plan), and Support (Overview). The main content area is titled "Migration plan" and provides instructions on migrating users and mailboxes to Office 365 Beta. It features two columns: "Exchange migration plan" and "IMAP migration plan". Each column lists requirements and includes a "Start" button. The Exchange migration plan requirements include migrating everything at once, supporting Exchange 2003, 2007, or 2010, and Small Business Server versions 2003, 2008, or 2011, with fewer than 1,000 mailboxes. The IMAP migration plan requirements include migrating everything at once, an IMAP mail server, Exchange Server 5.5 or Exchange Server 2000 with IMAP services enabled, and fewer than 1,000 mailboxes. The footer contains Microsoft copyright information, a footer menu with Community and Feedback, and a browser status bar showing "Local intranet | Protected Mode: Off" and a zoom level of 100%.

Figure 3: No matter which version of Exchange you're using, there is a preconfigured Office 365 migration plan.

You can use the Exchange Deployment Assistant to help you move to Office 365. This tool has received a makeover, helping admins work with Office 365, whether they want to go all-in with the cloud or use a hybrid approach (Figure 4).



Figure 4: The Deployment Assistant has been upgraded to now account for cloud-based and hybrid deployments.

In the Exchange Deployment Assistant, you can easily locate migration information as well as details for working in a hybrid/coexistence environment. After answering a few questions about the upgrade, the tool gives you a checklist in either a Web browser or a .pdf file that will lead you through the upgrade.

Resources from Metafore



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