

Third-Party Email Archiving for Office 365

Yes, it's needed.

Office 365 is a popular email communications system, but possibly falls short in the email archiving arena.

Here are a few reasons why:

Inefficient storage management

A primary benefit of email archiving is to use storage efficiently by using techniques such as deduplication, single-instance store and compression.

Office 365 maintains user archives independently of each other and loses most of these benefits. Additionally, some users may outgrow the mailbox limits.

Pay for ex-employee mailboxes

An organization's email archive should be available to it for as long as policy dictates and for all users, whether they are there with the company or not. In Office 365, the life of an individual user's archive is mapped to his or her mailbox.

When the user leaves the organization, you have to either delete the mailbox (and the archive), or continue to pay for an unused mailbox.

Inability to archive email from other mail systems

Office 365 cannot archive email from any other system.

So in cases where an organization runs a hybrid setup – a premium mail system like Exchange or Office 365 or Google Apps, etc. for top management, and an open-source, Linux-based or other 'small' economical mail server for the rest of the employees – you won't have a unified email archive.

Lock-in to Office 365

If a company ever wants to change and move out of Office 365, they aren't just changing their communications system. The archive is tightly coupled and the cost and effort needed to move archived email into a new system will be significant.

Retention policies have coarse granularity

In Office 365, the basic policies are applied on mailbox and folder-levels, whereas we often need granular control down to an individual email message.

Archive mailboxes could stop accepting email

Administrators often apply storage quotas to archive mailboxes, to prevent the company from incurring additional subscription costs. When these boxes fill up, they will stop accepting email, which isn't a good situation.

Indexing and eDiscovery limitations

Office 365's index latency (the time needed for email content to appear in search results) is supposed to be anywhere between 15 min and 1 hour, although there are several reports of a much longer latency time.

Also, there seem to be technical limitations on searching for email across all mailboxes, which means additional work and time needed to get the desired results.

No default email tamper detection

By default Office 365 does not check for email tamper detection and will not display information about the integrity of email in the archive.

Impact on mail server performance

Mail servers are built for routing email, not storing huge amounts for long periods of time. Using only journaling, or building in email archiving functionality normally impacts mail server performance negatively.

General usability issues

Being cloud-based, the email archive cannot be accessed, when offline. Additionally, there may be a network lag since email has to be retrieved from the cloud.

In conclusion, there are multiple reasons why a specialized email archiving solution from a third -party may be preferable to the built-in archiving functionality that Office 365 itself provides.