

# Critical Mission

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FEATURED ARTICLE

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## Microsoft's Cloud Strategy *A Quick Overview of the Future of Computing*

*Everyone who plans, manages or influences I.T. spending needs to be aware of cloud computing and how it can be leveraged to produce better solutions, faster and often cheaper. Microsoft's cloud strategy covers a very wide spectrum of products and services, from turn-key business solutions to fundamental building blocks intended for software developers.*

### Office.365

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Office.365 is the name for a family of online products and services related to Microsoft Office. Familiar to most are the browser-based companions to Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and OneNote. These apps, which carry the familiar ribbon toolbars and other desktop-style user interface elements, make it possible to open, share and do light editing of Office documents from anywhere there's an Internet connection. When you combine Office Web Apps with Exchange Online and SharePoint Online (covered in upcoming sections) you have a portable workplace accessible virtually anywhere.

### Windows Intune

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Windows Intune is a cloud-based PC management and support service. Through a simple web-based

console, your IT staff can provide remote assistance, centrally manage updates, and proactively help protect PCs from malware threats and solve other problems, so your employees can stay focused on the business. This configuration makes it particularly easy to outsource such tasks to a third party. Unlike the rest of the products and services mentioned in this article, Intune is in beta and should be released in early 2011.

### Exchange Online

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Microsoft Exchange Online offers "access from anywhere" to corporate e-mail, contacts, tasks, calendars and conference room scheduling, based on the features and functions of Microsoft's Exchange Server.

Exchange Online is particularly exciting because of how quick and easy it is to get up and running. A subscription is available for as little as \$5 per user per month. All it takes is filling out a couple of online forms and you can go from nothing to a fully provisioned and functional Exchange server in well under an hour.

Exchange Online can be purchased separately or in a "suite" combination with several other products and services.

### SharePoint Online

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SharePoint Online is all about connecting people so they can search, create, collaborate, and share information. SharePoint is arguably the most important and exciting part of Office.365 in terms of creating value and making your workforce more efficient and effective. The other components of Office.365 focus on a single user and rely on the user keeping track of information and performing self organization tasks. SharePoint brings all users together where they can contribute to a larger body of information.

## Dynamics CRM Online

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Dynamics CRM Online delivers sales automation, service management and marketing automation functionality through your browser and through integration with Outlook and other common productivity applications. Similar to Office.365, you can get started quickly and easily with Dynamics CRM simply by filling out a few forms and creating a subscription. Your data and services run securely in a Microsoft data center.

## Office Live Meeting

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Microsoft Office Live Meeting is a hosted web conferencing service that enables communication and collaboration with anyone, anywhere, at any time. Meetings can be scheduled in advance with careful control over attendance, or opened to a general audience of up to 250 attendees. With optional live audio and video and the capability to display any document or application screen, Live Meeting helps users minimize travel costs and related disruptions and streamline communications with colleagues, customers, and other audiences.

## Office Communications Online

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Office Communicator is an online corporate instant messaging utility that also provides presence awareness and the ability to use one-on-one audio and video. If you don't think instant messaging has a place in your company you're wasting time and missing out on some important efficiency features.

## Windows Azure

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Azure is the Windows operating system running as a cloud service in a Microsoft data center. I'm not talking about the visual components you associate with your Windows desktop; rather, Azure is the underlying operating system services that developers use to create applications.

End-users experience Azure indirectly by accessing a web site that uses Azure-based services behind the scenes. Silverlight applications also benefit from calling services hosted in an Azure data center.

## SQL Azure Database

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Azure applications can store data in a general "blob" storage service (files, images, and other simple data structures) or optionally use an online version of the SQL Server database. Recently, Alto set up a customer's Microsoft Access database in a SQL Azure instance without requiring any changes to the Access application's forms, queries, reports or code modules. It's amazing to see. If you've ever wondered how to "up size" a departmental solution to be securely accessible with great performance by a wider audience, SQL Azure is something to consider.

## Windows Live ID

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Windows Live ID is an identity and authentication system provided by Microsoft as an online service. 460+ million users have credentials that work with Windows Live ID. Microsoft offers three different software development kits that make it possible for developers to use this powerful service instead of reinventing the wheel and risk making implementation mistakes in a critical component like a secure sign-in.

## Summary

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It is very clear that Microsoft is moving quickly and aggressively into cloud computing and online services. Now is a good time to start educating yourself about the benefits of this trend and how your organization will respond.

If you're curious about online services and want to learn more, Alto offers a training class designed to get you up to speed, fast on the concepts and address all your questions and concerns. Visit our website at <http://www.altotraining.com> to view information about our training classes.

Contact Alto if you'd like a demonstration of any of the products or techniques discussed in this article. Our next webinar is devoted to these concepts.