

Critical Mission

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FEATURED ARTICLE

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Planning for Office 365 *A Quick Preview 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. The new **Office 365** is a major part of Microsoft's cloud strategy, covering a very wide spectrum of products and services, from turn-key business solutions to fundamental building blocks intended for software developers.*

Office 365

Office 365 is 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.

Office 365 is the next generation bundling of products and services known by the clunky name **Business Productivity Online Suite**, or BPOS. Office 365 is BPOS plus a whole lot more.

Pick Your Edition

The products and services that form Office 365 are available bundled into editions as well as available on an a la carte basis. An exhaustive list of editions and options is outside the scope of this article. Here's a short summary to give you an idea:

- E-Series, for information workers who have access to a computer workstation most of the time. Four levels of optional features ranging from basic e-mail and collaboration to Office web applications all the way to VOIP.
- K-Series, for "kiosk" workers who do not have a dedicated workstation and only occasionally use a computer. Two levels of optional features ranging from the basics (e-mail and intranet portal) to Office web apps.

The monthly per-user cost of E-Series ranges from \$10 to \$27. K-Series ranges from \$4 to \$10. Both have options for BlackBerry support, additional storage, and more.

Mix and Match, Change Over Time

Regardless of the edition you select, you are free to add or remove users and upgrade or downgrade editions and features on a case-by-case, monthly basis. For example, start with twenty E4 users and ten K2 users who are ready to go right away. Three months later add fifteen E2 and five K1 users as you roll out Office 365 to a branch office. A month after that, add Blackberry support for the twelve employees who need that feature.

In short, your Office 365 subscriptions grow and change over time with your organization.

Office 365 Components

The different editions offer combinations of the following components:

- E-mail via Exchange Online

- Collaboration via SharePoint Online
- Meetings and instant communications via Lync Online
- Word, Excel etc via Office Web Apps
- Voice mail and archiving
- Additional features added to Office apps
- Full Voice over IP (VOIP)
- BlackBerry support
- Additional storage space
- Strong encryption and compliance
- Extranet support for non-employee users

Exchange Online

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 \$2 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.

SharePoint Online

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.

Lync Online

Lync Online is an online corporate instant messaging utility that also provides presence awareness and the ability to use one-on-one audio and video, as well as conducting online meetings for groups. 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.

Lync’s web conferencing service 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, Lync helps users minimize travel costs and related disruptions and streamline communications with colleagues, customers, and other audiences.

Dynamics CRM Online

While not part of the Office 365 family, planning would not be complete without considering Dynamics CRM Online. 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.

Summary

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 Office 365 specifically or online services in general 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 to at <http://www.altotraining.com> to view information about our complete line of 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.