The Top 10 Reasons to Move to the Cloud

A white paper showcasing the benefits of a cloud migration and how to successfully manage corporate email signatures in Office 365

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Introduction: Cloud Computing - The Current Business Standard

It is now an inescapable fact that the cloud doesn't represent both the present and future of modern computing. No longer the untried product that it was at the start of the 2010s, cloud computing has rapidly matured into a service that provides better ROI, is more cost effective, and reduces infrastructure overheads for many companies around the world, while being immensely scalable. In addition, the risks that have been used to rationalize fears of the cloud have now been mitigated to near impossibilities.

You only need to look at the trajectory of Office 365 and how Microsoft has completely shifted its focus to supporting this over Exchange Server and its on-premises offerings. Released on 28 June 2011, its install base has grown to 200 million active users in less than ten years. This really highlights how modern businesses and the cloud have evolved in tandem to the point where they are interdependent on one another. Given that there are constant fears around data breaches, Microsoft has developed its cloud services with security, compliance, and privacy in mind, so much so that it has even established its own Trust Center. This is designed specifically to provide decision makers with peace-of-mind when it comes to migrating to the cloud.

With all of the benefits that now come utilizing cloud computing, you would be forgiven for thinking that migrating would be an easy decision for any company to make. However, there is still a core subset of organizations that either believe moving to the cloud is too risky or not worth considering at all. The idea of moving all IT services to some remote server can elicit negative reactions, especially if it is felt that in-house IT teams don't have the necessary experience to manage cloud migrations. Also, some companies simply want to keep all essential services within the confines of their own company, ensuring they retain complete control. Now, there always has to be a business case for a company to migrate in the first place. This will depend on variety of factors, particularly over budget and overall need. However, we'd argue that the benefits of cloud computing bring with it many more business benefits than drawbacks.

This white paper will aim to dispel the belief that migrating to the cloud is a worthless endeavor. We'll take a look at the top 10 reasons why continuing to utilize on-premises architecture can actually have a detrimental impact on your business, dispel some common misconceptions about moving to the cloud, and extol the benefits inherent in a successful migration.

Finally, the white paper will showcase our multi-award-winning cloud service for Office 365. Coming with a multitude of superior features and functionality not present in our previous software, we'll show you how email signature management can be made easy once you have completed a cloud migration.

> Microsoft has developed its cloud services with security, compliance, and privacy in mind

The Limitations of On-Premises Architecture

When looking at the cloud, it is important to understand how it works when compared to on-premises solutions and hardware. A cloud deployment means a vendor hosts all of your information, which is accessed via a web browser. On-premises, however, means you have local ownership over your data, hardware, and software.

While on-premises might seem like the safer option in theory, there are actually many drawbacks to running your IT systems in this manner. Here are the top 10 reasons why on-premises architecture cannot compete with the cloud in terms of flexibility, reliability, and security.

1. **The need to maintain a physical server**

   Using an on-premises solution means hosting the service yourself, i.e. on a server/s local to your organization. This means your end users' access to said solution and its performance depend upon the availability and good health of these servers. Unfortunately, this inevitably results in the need for constant upkeep. This means looking at the time and cost involved in replacing and upgrading parts, ever-increasing storage needs, and running regular maintenance tasks. These can all be avoided by using hosted services in the cloud. The upkeep impacts no longer reside with your IT team, but with the cloud service provider. This frees up their time for other business-critical operations.

2. **The initial outlay – hardware costs and software licenses**

   It's no secret that hardware can be expensive, although just how expensive is entirely dependent on the sort of on-premises solution you are looking to run. As well as the initial hardware, your organization has to factor in the additional cost of licences acquired for any solution. Also, when perpetual licences are concerned, the cost can be high and often prohibitively so for smaller companies, especially new ventures. With a cloud service, you end up paying a monthly cost, making it a lot easier to plan and budget for any purchases your organization might need. This subscription cost might seem initially higher when compared to on-premises hardware, but in the long term, it becomes a much more predictable company outgoing. That means the IT budget won't be needed for issues like equipment breaking down.

3. **The additional physical impact**

   When your company opts to host solutions locally on servers rather than utilize a cloud service, there are further physical considerations you'll have to consider too.

   Where are these servers going to be located? Depending on your requirements, you may require a dedicated server room or even a farm. Does your organization actually have the room to spare and, more importantly, is this space large enough to house further servers necessitated by growth? Should your server farm grow to be too large, you'll need to begin looking at air conditioning to ensure the cabinet or room doesn't overheat. Can your budget accommodate this additional expense? What if a piece of equipment malfunctions? You'll need to pay to replace it, which could can have a serious impact on your business operations.

   Does remaining on-premises become economical when you factor in your utility bills? Servers may end up generating large electricity bills for your company and your internet service. This is especially true when you factor in ensuring redundancy (a must!) via the addition of extra servers, as well as establishing a Multi-WAN internet connection using alternate phone lines or 4G connections.

4. The need for redundancy

Speaking of redundancy, by hosting your solution using on-premises architecture, it's up to you to build redundancy into your infrastructure. Business continuity planning is, for most organizations, an incredibly important exercise aimed at preventing any downtime of mission-critical services. Avoiding downtime or recovering full functionality quickly means planning your IT infrastructure, predicting potential risks, and building in means to remove or mitigate these risks. Not only does DR (Disaster Recovery) increase your costs, but also the amount of hardware and software you need to maintain.

Firstly, you'll want to store backups of all data, which entails adding physical disks to your environment. Data resilience is key and may even be a mandated requirement that comes with a certain level of data redundancy necessary for compliance. Still, should a malfunction occur, the risk of catastrophic data loss becomes severe unless you have an off-site backup service in place.

Then, ensuring the highest availability possible means replicating your infrastructure to achieve the best RTOs (Recovery Time Objectives) and RPOs (Recovery Point Objectives). Replication, while the best way of ensuring uptime, introduces complexity as well as cost. Availability is measured as a percentage of uptime, with companies often wishing to get as close to the impossible 100% as they can. Many strive to achieve a standard availability for systems or solutions equal to 'five 9s' or 99.999%. However, achieving this is exceptionally difficult as it involves more than just a simple DAG (Database Availability Group) setup.

A HAC (High Availability Cluster) involves any set of servers replicated to act as one single system, normally in more than one datacentrer and site. These HAC set ups are normally either passive-active or active-active for load balancing purposes. Even if you do have the benefit of being able to host services in another location, you'll have to consider what data is stored there and what security must be in place. External sites are often referred to as being either 'Hot', 'Warm' or 'Cold', which relates to the sort of equipment and data stored at the location, as well as how quick and easy it would be to recover in a disaster scenario. Ideally, you want a site to be classed as 'Hot', but that means storing all data at that site in a secure fashion that remains compliant, and with immediate access for end users.

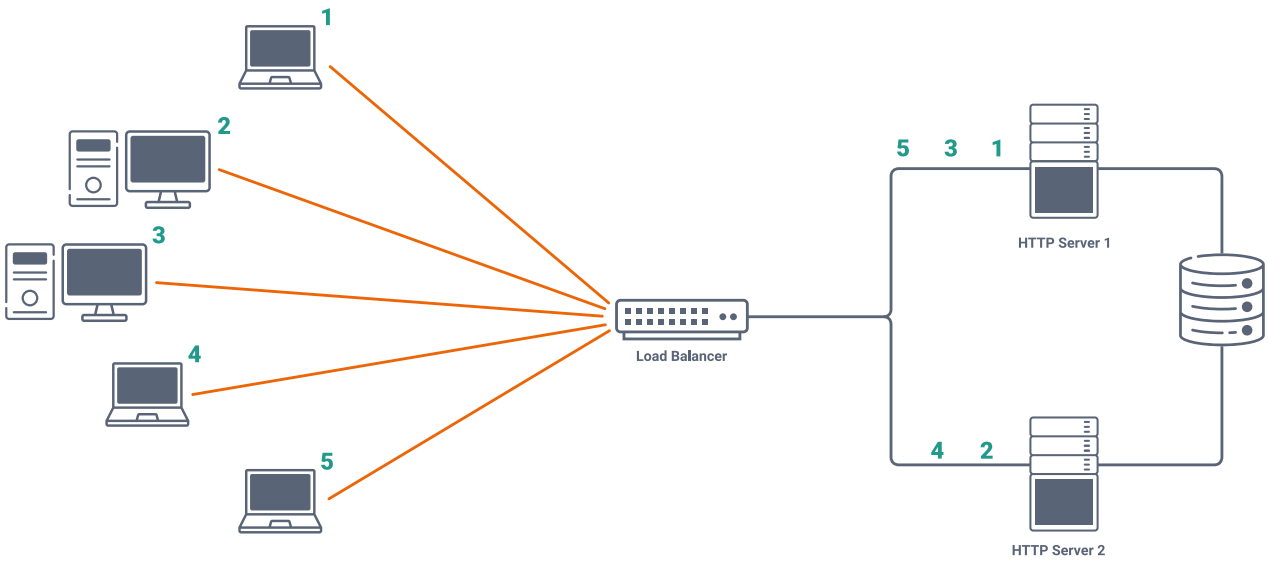

Figure 1 An example of a HAC (High Availability Cluster) set up.

Finally, there are situations that can happen outside of your control such as power cuts and internet outages. To prevent downtime caused from power issues, you need to invest in some sort of backup such as UPS (Uninterruptable Power Supplies) and RPSU (Redundant Power Supplies). This may even mean you need to utilize an onsite generator to ensure this never becomes an issue. If your internet goes down, you may need to be set up for Multi-WAN connections, or even use a 3G, 4G or satellite connection.

5. **Compliance issues**

When your company has specific compliance requirements to consider such as GDPR, it is down to your organization to achieve and prove these standards, costing you time and money. Compliance can require the attention of many employees, additional funds for outside audits, and the risk of potential fines if your infrastructure breaches specific regulations. When using a cloud solution, this never becomes an issue as the cloud service provider will have typically sought this compliance already. This reduces your liability to practically nil.

6. **Scalability needs**

The cloud allows your business to easily upscale or downscale your IT requirements as and when you need. You're able to almost immediately see the benefit of this when your business growth dramatically increases as you are able to purchase scalable space and pay for only what you use. This alleviates any concerns around expensive changes to your existing IT systems. Alongside lower costs, the ability to scale also makes disaster recovery a lot easier and is non disruptive to your environment. These options are not available if you decide to just utilize on-premises architecture as this will require installing new hardware, a substantial monetary cost.

7. **Complicated merge processes for company acquisitions**

When it comes to business mergers and acquisitions, understanding where your enterprise is at, where the company you want to acquire is at, and the potential use of the cloud to integrate between both IT systems is a huge plus. The ability to make deployments and integrations without physical hardware allows for operations to work at a much quicker rate. The simple truth is that using on-premises architecture hinders this process and winds up being much more costly and time-consuming.

8. **Unpredictable costs**

   As an IT administrator, you want every cost to be predicable so that you can plan more easily. This may not always be the case when you utilize an on-premises solution. This is because there is a much greater risk that you'll encounter situations with unexpected costs attached.

   For example, when you physically own the servers your organization operates on, should any part of this hardware break, you will need to pay to replace it. There could also be unexpected costs as you upscale your infrastructure and maintain pace with the growth of your organization. All of this cost is usually integrated into a subscription where a cloud solution is concerned and, as we have already identified, this is eminently more scalable than using on-premises hardware.

9. **Compatibility issues**

   A standard cloud solution normally benefits from utilizing a web-based 'front-end', making it hardware agnostic. What this essentially means is that the hardware used by your end users isn't restricted in any way. In a world where our BUDs (Business Use Devices) can vary from one to another and the prevalence of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) within around 80% of global organizations, utilizing a cloud solution typically guarantees universal compatibility. On-premises solutions, however, will be in the form of a download such as a .exe file. This means that they will often only be compatible with specific devices and operating systems.

10. **Difficulties for non-technical staff**

    Cloud solutions are designed to be used wherever there is internet access. They also incorporate modern and intuitive user interfaces for end users, making them incredibly easy-to-use. On-premises products, on the other hand, can be of a more technical nature and have a steeper learning curve. They are usually designed to be used by someone with a high-level of IT knowledge, often alienating individuals from other non-technical backgrounds.

Controlling Email Signatures Within Office 365

As you can see, there are many benefits available to companies that migrate to cloud services like Office 365. However, one of the more challenging aspects of moving to Office 365 is the ability to centrally design and manage corporate email signatures. For many organizations, it is often preferable that all emails contain a specific signature or disclaimer that is consistent for all users. Rather than relying on each employee to take charge of their own email signature design, IT administrators often find it easier to apply a specific template from one central location. For organizations on Office 365, this is done using Transport Rules.

In basic terms, Transport Rules, also known as mail flow rules, look for specific conditions within emails sent by an organization and take an appropriate action. They are similar to inbox rules used by many email clients like Outlook, but a Transport Rule takes actions on messages that are in transit rather than after they are delivered. Transport Rules come with a large set of conditions, exceptions, and actions, giving you a number of messaging policy options. When it comes to email signature management, Transport Rules let an organization set up and apply a disclaimer to all inbound and outbound messages. Notice the term 'disclaimer' rather than 'email signature'; the native functionality of Office 365 is only really designed to let a company create a plain-text disclaimer to appear at the bottom of an email.

If you wish to utilize a proper HTML email signature, your options become more limited. An IT administrator can copy-and-paste HTML code into the disclaimer editor and include web-hosted images. However, it is not possible to preview how a signature will look, it will be continuously added to the bottom of an email chain, the images will likely be blocked by certain email clients, and the HTML won't behave as expected: what works in Outlook might not in Gmail or iOS.

Without using a third-party solution, email signature management becomes difficult. IT administrators inevitably find this task takes up time that is far better suited to other important projects. That's where Exclaimer Cloud comes into play.

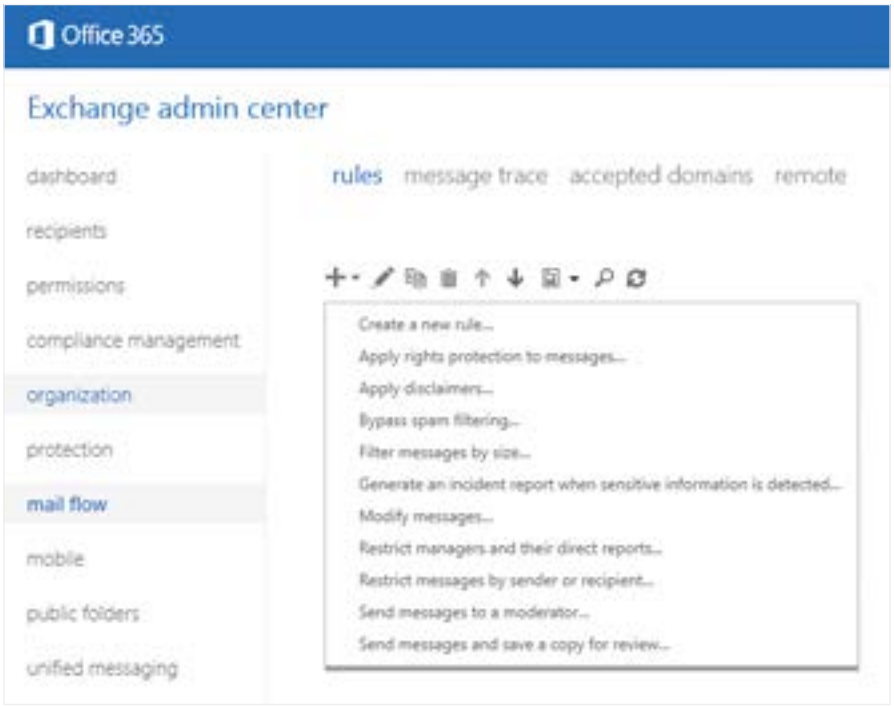

Figure 2 Building email signatures within the Exchange admin center of Office 365 comes with many challenges.

Using an Email Signature Management Solution

Exclaimer Cloud is specifically designed to make Office 365 email signature management easy. By using a web-based UI, a company can design and manage professional email signatures with the knowledge that they will be added to all messages sent from any web-enabled device. The service also allows for easy management of specific email signature elements including social media icons, promotional banners, and legal disclaimers without the need for advanced HTML skills.

Organizations can benefit from different signatures being applied based on rules and user attributes, such as time of day, department, recipient, and other conditions. The centralized control allows IT departments and ultimately those responsible for brand management to ensure that every email has the current messaging and brand identity.

Here are the top 10 benefits of using Exclaimer Cloud to manage your Office 365 email signatures, and the benefits they can bring to your organization.

1. **Choose from multiple setup options**

   One of the big advantages of using Exclaimer Cloud is the ability to deploy both server and client-side email signatures. If users prefer to see their email signature in their Outlook when typing a message, they can do so with the client-side setup. A company can also deploy the server-side setup, meaning email signatures are applied when sending from any web-enabled device and mail client.

2. **Create and manage signatures online**

   Exclaimer Cloud is a web-based service that comes with an intuitive drag-and-drop signature editor, meaning a company is not restricted to managing and editing signatures on one device. Email signature designs can be created in minutes by simply dragging elements into a template, and then previewed complete with a user's contact information.

3. **Allow multi-person access**

   Exclaimer Cloud allows an IT administrator to share access with anyone in their organization and assign them admin or editor permissions. This means that the IT department only needs to handle the setup of the service and then hand the reins over to the marketing team to manage the signature design process.

4. **Use enhanced folder security**

   In Exclaimer Cloud, email signatures can be grouped into folders based on attributes such as countries or departments, with the ability to then add additional rules. This includes restricting folder access to certain Exclaimer Cloud users and setting rules to ensure signatures will only apply to specified Office 365 users.

5. **Employ intelligent signature policies**

   With Exclaimer Cloud, a company can choose to apply a signature only to external recipients, internal ones, or be really specific and apply signatures based on the recipient's email address or domain name. Email signatures will then be applied to a specific user, an Office 365 group or a specific attribute such as city or job title.

6. **Apply additional attributes in signatures**

   Exclaimer Cloud allows for the use of Office 365 custom attributes within email signatures. Or, if a company continues to use a local Active Directory once they have moved to Office 365, extension attributes can be synced to Azure AD and then utilized in Exclaimer Cloud.

7. **Deploy an ISO certified solution**

   Exclaimer Cloud was awarded the ISO 27001 Certification Information for Security Management in 2016, the first product of its kind to do so. This makes it one of the most secure Office 365 email signature management solutions available. The ISO 27001 Certification is an internationally recognized best practice framework for an information security management system and requires rigorous auditing before it can be achieved.

8. **Utilize the power of Microsoft's Azure architecture**

   Exclaimer Cloud is built and hosted exclusively on Microsoft Azure, so there is no need for additional infrastructure. By utilizing the Azure platform, any email sent requiring a signature never leaves the Microsoft Cloud environment local to the organization. Azure also provides ultimate scalability and flexibility, using the same technologies as other Window platforms.

9. **Ensure signatures are applied at all times**

   Exclaimer Cloud is hosted within 12 load-balanced Microsoft Azure datacenters worldwide, and if an incident occurs at one of these, a comprehensive cross-datacenter system is in place to ensure mail flow is maintained. The service uses state-of-the-art tools and technologies to ensure 99.9% availability, and 24/7/365 monitoring services automatically detect any service alerts. This ensures reliability, resiliency, and high performance.

10. **Apply with third-party security solutions**

    If you choose to use a third-party security solution to handle outbound email from Exchange Online such as Mimecast or Barracuda, email signatures will still be applied by Exclaimer Cloud. Read this article to find out which security solutions are compatible with Exclaimer Cloud.

Final Thoughts

Cloud computing has truly defined digital transformation over the last decade, changing the way many companies operate as a result. In fact, it's now arguable that every business in the world is dependent on cloud services in some capacity, even it's just through the use of a web-enabled device. There may still be myriad reasons as to why a company would continue to use on-premises hardware, such as budget and personal business need. However, the rapid growth of cloud computing and the constant security/privacy improvements make migrating an attractive proposition.

When moving to the cloud, a company needs to ask itself if there are any real benefits to continued usage of its on-premises servers and equipment. The continued availability of the services you host on-premises depend entirely on the health of the machines you host them on. Hardware can be incredibly expensive to run and maintain, particularly when trying to future-proof your company. Ensuring the hardware remains reliable often means more capital investment, which can cause a real burden on IT budgets. Your company's ability to scale is limited, requiring you to devote more hours to buying and building new systems. And the responsibility for adhering with industry compliance falls squarely on your company's shoulders, adding a level of significant risk to your business operations.

The advantages of hosting your services in the cloud in the 2020s now far outweigh the perceived disadvantages. Cloud subscription costs will often remain largely predictable, making it easier for an IT department to plan its budget and not have to worry about paying for some unforeseen malfunction. Your storage needs can be built to scale by simply upgrading your plan, which is often key if you're going through a period of rapid company expansion. There's no need to install new software patches and updates as they automatically occur. Compliance issues rest in the hand of your cloud service provider, keeping your liability to a bare minimum. And with upkeep no longer the responsibility of the IT department, their time is freed up for other business-critical operations.

Once you make the move to a service like Office 365, there are multitude of cloud apps and services available to make your business operations move smoother than ever before. Designed with ease-of-use in mind, these add-ons again free up an IT department's time. One such service is Exclaimer Cloud, allowing a company to centrally design and manage corporate email signatures for all users.

As Exclaimer Cloud is hosted outside of your organization, no upfront investment in hardware is required, meaning no additional IT administration or ongoing maintenance. Signatures are easily designed and then applied to all emails sent from any web-enabled device. Users' contact details are taken from your Office 365 Directory, automatically populating signature templates with the correct information. All updates made to Exclaimer Cloud are automatic and will not impact the running of the service. And signature management can easily be passed over to the Marketing department, taking this task off of IT's hands.

That's why tens of thousands of companies around the world trust Exclaimer to give them complete control over cooperate email signatures using the latest cloud technology. Learn more about Exclaimer by visiting www.exclaimer.com and try Exclaimer Cloud for free today.

> The rapid growth of cloud computing and the constant security/privacy improvements make migrating an attractive proposition

ABOUT EXCLAIMER

Exclaimer is the recognized global market leader in on-premises and cloud-based email signature software and solutions for Office 365, G Suite and Microsoft Exchange. Its products are used by over 75 million users in 150+ countries.

Its diverse customer base includes renowned international organizations such as Sony, Mattel, 10 Downing Street, NBC, the Government of Canada, the BBC and many more organizations of all sectors and sizes. The company has been the recipient of multiple industry awards over the years and is the only company of its type to have successfully achieved the ISO 27001 Certification for its cloud-based signature management service.

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