

# Conversational Archive Migrations to Office 365

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- Compliance impacts of your Office 365 migration
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**2<sup>nd</sup>**  
Edition

By Nathan O'Bryan (Microsoft MVP and MCSM)  
Foreword by J. Peter Bruzzese (Microsoft MVP)

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By Nathan O'Bryan

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## Foreword from J. Peter Bruzzese

After the ENRON scandals and sexual harassment lawsuits of the late 90's and early 2000's "legal compliance" became a must for nearly all businesses to some degree or another. Compliance requires both data retention and discoverability of that retained data. Now, if you've ever tried to perform eDiscovery using tape backups you understand the need for the archive's invention. Archives initially made retention, discoverability and hence compliance much easier. Over the years, enterprise-grade archive solutions evolved their feature sets to allow for end-user interactivity and more.

And so here we are. After years of using some form of on-premises archive solution (software or appliance) you're now facing the possibility of a migration because you're moving to Office 365. Assuming you really WANT (or need) your data and cannot just unplug your archive server/appliance and shove it in some closet). Well, I have 3 pieces of advice for you based on my extensive migration strategy experience.

1. Before you migrate data, no matter where you are moving it, cull the data. If your retention requirement (through legal or corporate policy) is 2 years then make sure that is exactly what you have retained. Often folks just keep holding extra data on-prem for no reason. Cull it!
2. Determine where you're putting that data. Office 365 offers a repository but some prefer to keep their data in a separate cloud-based solution as a form of message level risk mitigation, data agility and so on. The archive solution offered within Exchange Online is a repurposed "legal hold" solution that requires a mental paradigm shift that some (myself included) don't completely embrace.

3. Figure out how to retrieve the data from your existing archive solution. The APIs for archives are designed to ingest data, not exgest it. Not easily anyway. You will most likely need a third-party solution to extract the data in an incorruptible and usable format.

Office 365's Exchange Online solution is absolutely awesome in my opinion. As an MVP (first for Exchange and then for Office 365 prior to being renamed Office Servers and Services) I'm completely sold on the value of Exchange Online. However, much like on-premises Exchange, we typically surround our messaging solution with third-party enhancements solutions (ie. a backup/recovery solution, secure gateway solution, archive solution, etc.) and in modern times many of these are in the cloud. My risk mitigation recommendation is to find a solid cloud-based all-in-one solution (meaning it provides advanced security enhancements, archiving, and more all within a single solution.) You don't want to daisy chain multiple solutions on to the front end of Office 365, so an all-in-one is key. Move your services over first before you move a mailbox or migrate your data from either the mailbox or the archive. Once you're ready, find a solid archive migration solution to help you get your data from point a to point b.

Beyond those few pearls of wisdom I encourage you to pay close attention to the wisdom and experience of this book's author.

J. Peter Bruzzese  
Office Servers and Services MVP



## Note from the Author

Hi, I'm Nathan.

It looks like you're investigating a migration to Office 365 and maybe have some questions about how migrating your archive data is going to work. Well, you've come to the right place. Over the course of this book, we're going to talk through all the information you'll need to ensure everything goes swimmingly.

In this book, I am going to talk about email archives. What they are, why we use them, when we should and should not use them, how archives impact your compliance strategy, and what it's going to take to migrate them into Office 365.

I've tried to make this book fun and informative. Hopefully you enjoy it, and learn something useful about migrating your archives into Office 365.

Nathan O'Bryan



## The “Conversational” Method

We have two objectives when we create a “Conversational” book: First, to make sure it’s written in a conversational tone so that it’s fun and easy to read. Second, to make sure you, the reader, can immediately take what you read and include it in your own conversations (personal or business-focused) with confidence.

These books are meant to increase your understanding of the subject. Terminology, conceptual ideas, trends in the market, and even fringe subject matter are brought together to ensure you can engage your customer, team, co-worker, friend and even the know-it-all Best Buy geek on a level playing field.

### “Geek in the Mirror” Boxes

We infuse humor into our books through both cartoons and light banter from the author. When you see one of these boxes it’s the author stepping outside the dialog to speak directly to you. It might be an anecdote, it might be a personal experience or gut reaction and analysis, it might just be a sarcastic quip, but these “geek in the mirror” boxes are not to be skipped.



Hi! Within these boxes I can share just about anything on the subject at hand. Read 'em!

## A Brief History of Email and the “Archive”



I figure the best place to start our discussion is at the beginning. We could try starting in the middle, but I did that once and it didn't go well. Starting at the end could be interesting, but I'm not that good of a writer yet. Maybe for my next Conversational Geek book...

Anyway, email has been around almost as long as networked computers have. The first email system I started working on was called AUTODIN. AUTODIN stood for Automatic Digital Network Systems, and it was an early foray into email communication by the United States Department of Defense. There may have been earlier email systems, but the US government started setting up AUTODIN in the 1950s, so I'm thinking there are probably not a ton of older email systems.

When I got to it in the early 90s, AUTODIN was running on its last leg. It was slow, complicated, and difficult to use. To address a message required 14 lines (if I remember correctly... I'm sure someone will correct me if I'm wrong on that point) of very specific information, including the planet to which the message was to be delivered! It was really closer to a telegram service than what we think of today as an email system, but it did work. It allowed for secure communications to be sent around the world at the speed of light.

One thing it didn't allow for was any type of message storage within the system. If a message was addressed to you (and really the only way a message would be addressed to you was if you were a high ranking officer) you received a printout of that message. If you wanted to keep that message, you need to file it in an ancient piece of technology called a "file cabinet".

This "file cabinet" worked much like a modern email archive does, except it was worse in every conceivable way. If you have a few hours to kill sometime, I recommend you find an old person and ask them about these "file cabinets" and what they were used for. I'm sure that will make for a fascinating afternoon.

Anyway, as email systems progressed they started to include the concept of a mailbox. A mailbox is an electronic repository where you can store email messages you have received. I'm sure that last sentence is eye-roll inducing for a large percentage of the audience of this book, but in early email systems the concept of a mailbox was pretty important. It meant you could store your email messages electronically, and use them later, electronically. Without the mailbox, features like "reply" are not possible.

As you can imagine, the mailbox was quite a popular addition to email systems. Users loved it, but it did pose a bit of a problem for administrators. For users to be able to store email messages, they would have needed to be saved on a hard drive

somewhere. If you are the administrator for a system that supports a lot of users, even small mailboxes can quickly take up a lot of hard drive space.

As you read this, the problem of hard drives space may not seem like that big of a deal to you. I just did a quick search on Amazon for a hard drive that would be capable of working in an Exchange 2016 server, and I found a 2TB hard drive for \$56.

If my math is correct, that means that one GB of storage costs a little less than 3 cents. Another way to look at that is that an Office 365 mailbox of 50GB that has 4 DAG copies takes up about \$6 worth of hard drive space. Note: A DAG is a database availability group, which is used to provide active/passive continuous replication failover for Exchange 2010 – 2016.



Hard drives were not always so cheap, or so big. Another quick internet search shows me that the cost of 1GB of hard drive space in 1981 was \$300,000. That means that four copies (the standard redundancy built into Office 365) of an Office 365 mailbox of 50 GB would have cost about \$2,400,000,000 (that is two point four billion). Let that sink in for a minute, then tell me technology is not amazing!

Even in 1994, when I was working as an email administrator on Banyan Vines servers, the cost of 1GB of hard drive space was \$1,000. That would bring the cost of the storage for your Office 365 mailbox down to \$200,000. A much more reasonable price, but still a little high for most budgets.

This meant that mailbox sizes had to be kept under control. At first, this was fairly easy. But as time went by and people relied on email more and more, it became much harder. People's

jobs became dependent on email, and having access to historic email messages. They were sending and receiving hundreds of messages per day, and they needed to keep those messages for years.

## **Email in the Modern Workplace**

Email is now the single most important application in the typical office worker's daily life. We spend all day every day sending and receiving hundreds of email messages. We need to keep email messages for years, and we expect to be able to access those messages instantly from many different types of devices.

An average user's mailbox is now over 1GB, and I've seen single users with mailboxes approaching 100GB. It's not just email in these mailboxes anymore either. Today's mailboxes hold voice mail messages, Microsoft Office files (.docx, .xlsx, .pptx, etc.), graphics, pictures, videos, address books, task lists, calendars, and some other stuff too.

Not only do users expect to get all these different types of information in their mailbox, but they expect to be able to access this information from an Outlook client, a web browser, a phone, and a tablet. We expect all these different clients to work instantly online, but also we want to be able to work with all or most of the data stored in our mailboxes from any of these clients offline as well.

Because users are sending and receiving so much information via email these days, it has become a focal point for multiple legal matters. Organizations have many different compliance criteria they much follow to ensure what information can and cannot be in email, how long email must be retained, who can electronically communicate with whom, and how email systems are kept secure.

## Email Compliance

In today's corporate environment organizations have to be very careful about how their email is handled, tracked, secured, and searched. Depending on the industry, a single organization may have a dozen different compliance criteria applying to just their email systems. So how do organizations meet these requirements?

I would not recommend anything as a "one size fits all" or "one stop shop" for any sort of compliance solution. Compliance is like taxes; that is to say if I made \$50,000 this year, how much do I owe in taxes? The only answer is "it depends".



In the world of IT compliance there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Maybe I should take that back; there are wrong answers, but the only "right" answers are the ones you can defend.

The organizations I have worked with that have the best compliance solutions are the ones who fully understand what decisions they have made, and why they have made them. If an organization can do that, the rest is just configuration.

When it comes to the question, "Is my email system compliant?", the answer is going to be complex. It's going to depend on a lot of different factors that mostly are going to fall outside the scope of this book. The best advice I can give on the compliance front is to speak to someone who has been through multiple compliance audits. Experience is the best teacher.

## Mailbox Archives

With the huge growth of mailbox sizes, the solution many email administrators have turned to is mailbox archives.

Mailbox archives can take several different forms, but in general the mailbox archive is a second tier place to store email messages. This second tier storage is generally less expensive than the standard mailbox, but that cost savings comes at the price of reduced functionality. The functionality reduction depends on the kind of archive you choose.

A mailbox archive can take a number of different forms. The first, and simplest form of an “archive” is the Personal Storage Table (PST) file. PST files are created by Outlook as a way to store email messages locally on the workstation hosting Outlook. PST files are mostly going to be out of the scope of this book, but I wanted to mention them here briefly for the sake of completeness.



From a compliance perspective .PST files, while great for dealing with quotas and the need most end-users have for pack ratting their email, they are the bane of existence for IT admins looking to provide discoverability, which as you know is the key to compliance.

In this book, I am going to focus on two other types of mailbox archives, first party and third-party archive mailboxes. Before I get into the differences between first party and third-party archive mailboxes, I want to say I don’t really have an opinion on which is “better”. I’ve worked with a lot of organizations, and I’ve helped many of them come to a decision on how to handle mailbox archives.

There are pros and cons to each choice, and I plan to spend much of the rest of this book laying out those pros and cons in hopes that you, as an educated consumer, will be able to make the decision that best fits your organization’s needs. Once we cover everything you need to know about archive mailboxes, we’ll cover the information you need to know about how best

to handle the migration of that data when you're ready to move to Office 365.

First came the third-party archive mailboxes. As has happened many times before, and will likely happen many more times to come, Microsoft releases a huge product that meets nearly all the needs of their corporate customers. That product enjoys wide adoption. However, Microsoft leaves a feature hole (or holes), and there is always a third-party solution to take up the slack. In this case, we're talking about archiving mailboxes.

Around the time of Exchange 2003, email was really exploding in popularity in the workplace. Exchange had matured to the point where it was reliable enough, affordable enough, and widely available enough that pretty much every company had their own email system. The problem with Exchange 2003 was the only way to build a highly available system was to use expensive storage in the form of a Storage Area Network (SAN). If anyone reading this need an explanation, a SAN is a storage device that allows multiple servers to attach to a pool of hard drives. These hard drives can be made redundant via various RAID configurations.



While a SAN is a great solution for ensuring your data is stored in a highly available, scalable, and secure way, the downside to a SAN is this: it's expensive. Even today, when 2TB hard drives are available on Amazon for \$56, it's not uncommon for an IT department to spend half its budget on storage.

Because the corporate workspace was becoming more and more reliant on email, and the storage required was very expensive, third-party archiving solutions were born. These third-party solutions gave end users the ability to retain more email without that email having to be stored on the very expensive SAN storage.

In addition to giving IT departments a less expensive way to store email, this archive also brought a great number of new compliance features that Microsoft was not offering. Archiving solutions started building better search capabilities into their products, interactivity for end-users so they can touch the read-only archive but not delete email, better retention options, and even some eDiscovery tools that became very important for legal discovery. For most of a ten-year period, Exchange didn't really have a whole lot of native archiving and compliance features, so third-party archiving solutions filled the gap.

Microsoft continues to improve the archiving and compliance features built into Exchange (and Exchange Online). Exchange 2010 was the first version that could come close to being comparable with the features available in third-party archiving solutions. With the release of Exchange 2013, Microsoft finally had a semi-complete solution with some of the features and functionality available from third-party archiving solutions.

# Planning for Migrating Mailbox Archives to Office 365



*“You thinking of creative ways to migrate our archive solution?”*

With all that as a background, it’s time to start thinking about planning your migration to Office 365. As you have hopefully figured out by now, planning an Office 365 migration is a pretty big job with a lot of moving parts. I would highly recommend you involve an expert to ensure you cover all the bases.

For the purposes of this book, we’re going to limit our planning conversation to planning your archive data migration, which is still a pretty big task in itself. Here is a quick list of the things I recommend you think about. We’ll go into each of these in more detail shortly.

1. How do users currently access archive data?
2. What administrative access do you currently have to archive data?
3. How long will it take to move archive data out of its present location?
4. Will all the same data remain in the archive, post migration?
5. What features and functionality do you currently have with your archive?
6. What features and functionality do you need with your archive?
7. How long do you need to keep archive data?
8. Should you be removing old archive data?
9. How much does your data archive currently cost?
10. What tools will you use to move the archive data?

That's a pretty long list of things to think about, and there are a lot of questions you might need to dig into a bit to get the answers you need.

## **How do users currently access archive data?**

In my twenty-five plus years of IT experience, the one thing I have found to be the most consistent as technology changes is that users don't like losing functionality. If a user feels comfortable doing his or her job in one specific way, that user is going to be upset if they lose that access.

There are many different types of third-party email archives out there (software, appliance, cloud), and they have many different types of user interfaces. Some use web portals, some integrate directly into Outlook, some have mobile phone apps. I think the first step in planning your archive migration is this: understand how your users use your current solution so you can ensure the end result of your migration does not leave

them in a place where they perceive they have less access than they did before the migration.

Even if your destination platform ends up not supporting an access type your users are expecting, proper planning and user training can make the transition much easier than if the users discover the loss of functionality on their own.

## **What administrative access do you currently have to archive data?**

Probably just as important as your users feeling comfortable with the destination archiving platform, is that your administrators feel comfortable with it. In my experience administrators are more forgiving about having to learn new interfaces and ways of accessing data, but they still need to be given the opportunity to ensure they will have the tools they need to do their day-to-day jobs.

## **How long will it take to move archive data out of its present location?**

Moving archive data out of its present location can be difficult. The thing about service providers is that they like it when you use their service. When you tell them you are going to stop using their service, they often become somewhat less helpful.

I guess it's somewhat understandable. No service provider pays the bills by building awesome tools for you to move away from their product. Most of them stay within the bounds of civility while you are migrating away from their platform, but I have seen a few that seem to go out of their way to make it as hard as possible to move to a new service provider. Understanding what challenges you're going to have up front will save you lots of headaches down the road. In some cases, you may need a third-party solution to extract that data in an incorruptible format for shipping elsewhere.

Having a complete understanding of a client's source archive system as well as the archive environment (servers, storage, network) is an important component of the migration scoping process. Gathering this information allows for an archive migration vendor to provide an accurate migration timeframe.

## **Will all the same data remain in your new archive, post migration?**

As you migrate to Office 365, it might make sense to move certain types and amounts of data out of your archive solution. Most Office 365 mailboxes have a 50 GB limit. If you are moving from an on-premises messaging system where you users have 5 GB mailbox limits, you may want your users to move a considerable portion of their archived mail into their new, much larger primary mailboxes.

Maybe your users have become accustomed to saving large amounts of Office files in their email archive, but as you move to Office 365 you would like to transition those files into SharePoint Online sites. Maybe your current solution saves IM history to an archive, but as you move to Office 365 you want your users' Skype for Business conversation history saved to their mailboxes.

Maybe you have some other type of data that will not easily migrate into an Office 365 archive mailbox. Either way, it's important to know what types of data you'll be migrating, and how those data types will or will not work with your destination archive mailbox solution.

## **What features and functionality do you currently have with your archive?**

Except for maybe cost, the features and functionality of any IT solution are generally the factors on which buying decisions are made. It's always important to look at the capabilities of your current archiving solution and carefully compare them to your

target solution. Legal hold, eDiscovery, data loss prevention, and access portals are some of the most important features, but there may be some other feature that makes or breaks the solution for your organization.



For example, if your current archive solution allows users to interact with their archive data without deleting, keep in mind that the Office 365 “legal hold” archive solution will not allow for end-user interactivity. That may or may not be a deal breaker depending on your needs.

There is no right or wrong feature set, just the features that are most important to your organization. Too often, in my experience, an organization gets swept up in the process of a migration project and overlooks a critical bit of functionality.

## How long do you need to keep archive data?

The whole point of an archiving solution is to keep data. The problem is it can be tough to figure out what data needs to be kept for what period of time. Keeping “everything” is not always the best plan, it can even be detrimental.

If your organization has compliance reasons to retain every email message sent and received by your C-level executives for seven years, OK. The problem is that sometimes keeping that data for seven years and one day can end up causing difficulty. If you *have* the data, it can be subject to a legal discovery. Keeping data that you are not required to keep can make that discovery process more expensive.

## **How much does your data archive currently cost?**

The only reason most companies exist is to make money. I'm a few credits short of my MBA, but I'm pretty sure that spending less money is generally considered a good thing.

Often the biggest driver to moving to Office 365 archive mailboxes is cost. When you get an unlimited archive mailbox included with the standard license, most organizations are going to take a long hard look at continuing to use a third-party solution with an additional licensing cost.

That is not to say that a third-party archiving solution is absolutely off the table. Many organizations still want to keep archive data separate from their main mailboxes. That might be because they feel safer with their data being stored by two separate providers (aka data portability or agility), or it might be because of some feature that Office 365 mailbox archives just don't offer, like end-user interactivity.

## **What tool will you use to move the archive data?**

It is vitally important that you understand how your migration tool works, what it can do for you, and how fast it can get those tasks done. Is it a web based tool, or does it require some on-premises installation? Are you going to deploy the tool yourself, or are you going to use a consultant? What sort of support do you get from the migration tool provider? Will that support work with Microsoft's support for Office 365?

A large concern with a migration is the source and destination platforms. Just within Exchange, migrating from Exchange 2003 is a significantly different process than migrating from Exchange 2013. More dramatic migration from completely separate messaging platforms requires even more planning and more flexible tools.

Each platform has different access protocols, and each has different types of data it supports. This means that some tools just can't handle migration to or from some platforms.



The native Office 365 migration tools do a solid job of migrating data from Exchange servers into Office 365, however, you want to make sure the migration tool you use is able to properly track and account for every message that is being migrated.

## Putting Your Planning All Together



*Migration Planning Will Keep Your House of Cards from Falling*

Once you've gone through all these questions, and maybe some of your own, it's time to put together a list of

requirement for your migration project. In my experience, far too often the IT staff of an organization planning a migration will skip this step to their own detriment.

As I've said, my day job is as a consultant, and I go through this process pretty regularly. There is a lot of the migration process that I can completely handle for my customers, but writing requirements is not included in that list. I've done enough migration projects that I can generally come up with some pretty good suggestions of requirements that other organizations in your industry have used, but that does not mean your organization won't have some requirements that don't occur to me. Breaking down your requirements into business requirements, technical requirements, and user requirements might be helpful to you. I find a good project manager can be invaluable in this process.

## **Project Timeline**

When planning your migration project, it's important to ensure that you have a reasonable timeline established and agreed to by all parties. I've seen far too many projects derailed by conflicts over the timelines. Management always wants projects done as fast as possible, and IT staff always want to ensure they have enough time so they are not rushed. Finding the proper balance for each project is tough but necessary.

Sometimes external forces will have more impact on your migration's timeline than you'd like. Moving out of a data center, or an upcoming software contract renewal can force a project to move faster than anyone would want, but these are the sort of things we need to deal with in real life.

## **Keeping Your Users Informed**

The success or failure of any migration project mostly depends on the perceptions of the end user community. They are the people who need to come to work every day and do their jobs.

They cannot be interrupted, or at least deserve good notification if they must be interrupted.

In my experience, users will accept a lot during a difficult transition as long as you warn them ahead of time. If the end user community has a chance to plan around your migration, then they will understand brief outages and interruptions to their work days. If, however, users suffer outages, feature losses, or any other sort of interruption without prior notice, they can get pretty cranky.

Of course before you can tell you users about outages and interruptions caused by your migration project, you need to know about them yourself. This means having a deep technical understanding of your current messaging platform, and the tools you are using to facilitate your migration. I might recommend you include an expert who has successfully completed this type of migration before.

## **Understanding Your Tools and Platforms**

Maybe the most important consideration when planning your archive migration is understanding the platforms and tools involved. I can't stress enough the importance of experience to the success of your migration project. As organizations tend to do this sort of migration once in a great while, it may be a good idea to involve a consultant.

When considering an archive migration consultant, look for providers who offer both a licensed software solution as well as managed service solution options. You should also consider a consultant's history in the archive migration space... experience matters.

Look for a consultant who has the ability to migrate data from multiple source archive platforms as well as diverse mail systems. Make sure the consultant can directly ingest the extracted source archive system data in Office 365.

Considering the varied design and deployment of source archive systems, extracting data from each may require a different set of migration tools and processes. Consider a consultant with an array of migration methodology capabilities who has the ability to employ the right tool for the job.

I'm not saying you can't do a successful archive migration without a consultant. I have no idea what your experience and expertise is. What I am saying is that a deep technical understanding of all the parts involved, and a few successful run-throughs of the process will increase the chance of completing your migration successfully. The best way to find that experience is by using a consultant. While I'm at it, a good project manager can be invaluable in keeping everyone honest.

## **The Big Takeaways**

If you've made it this far, you've seen that we've covered a lot of information in a fairly short space. We've talked about why mailbox archives are important, how you can use mailbox archives to help with your organization's compliance responsibilities, and some tips on how you can plan your archive migration project.

I've tried to give you all the important information, but now you have to put it all together and make a plan that fits your organization's needs. This is not a simple process, but the good news is that help is out there. There are great tools available, and there are professionals who know how to get these projects done.

Good Luck!



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# Easily “converse” about migrating your email archives into Office 365.

There is a lot to think about when planning to migrate your organization to Office 365. In this book we cover everything you need to know about migrating your email archives. From data types, to the compliance impact of your migration, you'll understand all the ins and outs of your migration project.



## About Nathan O'Bryan

Nathan is a Microsoft MVP for Office Servers and Servers, and a Microsoft Certified Solutions Master: Messaging. Nathan can be seen speaking at conferences like IT/DEV Connections and Microsoft Ignite. Follow him on Twitter @MCSMLab



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