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Game Changing Technology for Expert Public Folder Migrations

What You Need to Know Before Starting an Exchange Server Migration

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Why you will have to rethink your approach to public folder storage and management.

In the leadup to the release of Exchange Server 2007, Microsoft made an announcement that public folders were being de-emphasized in the upcoming release, and would eventually be removed altogether. Exchange Server admins of the time were encouraged to begin working to phase out public folders from their organizations, and to look for ways to migrate public folder content into SharePoint. However, Microsoft's customers made it clear that public folders were a useful feature that should not be eliminated from Exchange Server. Thankfully, Microsoft listened.

Although rumors still persist that Microsoft is going to be eliminating public folders from Exchange Server, the company has made it clear that public folders are here to stay. In fact, Microsoft even went so far as to modernize public folders in Exchange Server 2013, in an effort to relieve some common administrative pain points. Even today, public folders are still in use, and are a first class feature of Microsoft Exchange Server and Exchange Online (Office 365).

Microsoft's public folder modernization was the result of a major architectural change. Whereas public folders previously resided in a dedicated public folder store, Microsoft removed the public folder store in favor of public folder mailboxes, which were introduced in Exchange Server 2013 and continue to be used in Exchange Server 2016 and Office 365.

Microsoft's transition to public folder mailboxes meant that for the first time, public folder data could be managed in the same way as mailbox data. The use of public folder mailbox made backup and recovery of public folder data much easier than it previously had been. This change also made it possible to protect public



folder data through database availability groups.

Although public folder mailboxes solved a number of problems that had persisted for years, and relieved some significant administrative pain points, the transition also created some problems for Exchange admins. Simply put, the transition to public folder mailboxes stemmed from such a major architectural change, that many of the long standing rules for public folder planning and management no longer apply. Hence, anyone who is planning to upgrade from a pre-Exchange 2013 version of Exchange to a more current version or to Office 365 will have to rethink their approach to public folder storage and management.

TWO MIGRATION CHALLENGES

When it comes to migrating public folder data to either a

newer version of Exchange Server or to Microsoft Office 365, there are two main challenges that must be considered. The first of these challenges is coping with the new storage architecture that is used for public folder data. This particular issue is so subtle that it is often overlooked, and yet failing to pay attention to the underlying architectural differences can result in a variety of different problems.

The essence of this problem is that whereas public folders once resided in a dedicated public folder database, public folders now exist within public folder mailboxes in a mailbox database. Mailbox databases have a completely different set of limitations and rules than public folder databases. Many of these differences tend to be obscure, and not widely publicized. For example, Microsoft does not support more than 2,000 concurrent connections to public folder mailboxes. References to this particular limitation are buried deep within the Exchange Server documentation, and many Exchange Server administrators do not even realize that this limitation exists.

The concurrent connection limit for public folder mailboxes is just one example of an architectural difference between a public folder database and a public folder mailbox. Microsoft has documented the limitations that apply to public folder mailboxes, as well

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as its best practices for planning, implementing, and maintaining these mailboxes. However, this information is widely scattered throughout the Exchange Server documentation, and tends to be difficult to piece together.

COPING WITH COMPLEXITY

The second challenge that administrators face when migrating public folder data to either a newer version of Exchange Server or to Office 365 is the migration itself. Public folders, both large and small, tend to be inherently complex. In most cases, public folders are arranged into deep hierarchies, with permissions being assigned on a per-folder basis.

Any administrator attempting to migrate legacy public folders to a modern public folder mailbox will need to do two things. First, the migration must preserve the public folder tree structure, the folder permissions, the folder content, and mail enabled folders.

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The second thing that a migration solution must do is to verify the integrity of the existing public folder structure. It is relatively common for problems to exist deep within a public folder hierarchy, and such problems can derail an organization's migration efforts.

So far, Microsoft has not adequately addressed the challenges of public folder migrations (nor is it their responsibility to do so). This is not to say that Microsoft does not provide a means to migrate legacy public folders to public folder mailboxes. Microsoft does indeed provide a public folder migration tool, but this script based tool tends to be inadequate for larger migrations. Microsoft's simplistic migration script can migrate public folder data, but it does not account for large organizations in which Exchange Server migrations take an extended amount of time to complete. In these situations, there will be a transition period during which some user's mailboxes will reside on the newer Exchange Server version, while other mailboxes remain on the legacy system. An "all at once" public folder migration can cause users to lose public folder access for hours, days, or even weeks.

A public folder migration tool should ideally be able to synchronize public folder data so that copies reside on both the new and the legacy Exchange Servers during the transition period, so that users may continue to use public folders while the Exchange Server migration is ongoing. An ideal public folder migration tool should also be able to examine the public folder architecture for potential problems before allowing the migration to begin. If any problems are detected, the tool should provide the administrator with meaningful guidance to help them to resolve the issue in a timely manner.

Priasoft Takes the Risk Out of Public Folder Migrations

Priasoft has been specializing in Exchange Server migrations for 15 years.

Given the difficulty of migrating legacy public folders to public folder mailboxes, it isn't exactly surprising that a number of different vendors have begun to offer public folder migration products. When it comes to migrating something as important as public folder data however, vendor choice should not be taken lightly. Priasoft has been specializing in Exchange Server migrations for 15 years, and incorporates a wealth of experience into its Public Folder Migration and Synchronization Manager for Office 365 and Exchange.

This tool, which works with Exchange Server 5.5 and higher (and Office 365) is designed to take the risk out of public folder migrations, while also expediting the migration process, and ensuring that public folders remain accessible throughout the transition.

One of the tool's key features is its synchronization engine. Rather than performing a single pass migration of public folder data, Priasoft's tool establishes bi-directional, full duplex synchronization of public folders between the source and destination servers.

This ensures that public folder data (and any associated permissions) will be accessible in both the old and the new Exchange Server environments. That way, any users whose mailboxes have not yet been migrated will continue to be able to access the public folders in their original location, while users whose mailboxes have been migrated can access the public folders from within a public folder mailbox. If a user modifies a public folder's contents or creates a new public folder, then that change is replicated, regardless of whether the change occurred in the legacy or the new environment.

Priasoft's solution is ideally suited for migrating large public folder implementations. The solution does not

utilize PST files or local file storage, thereby eliminating some of the more common constraints to the migration process. The entire solution is based on a scalable architecture that can be adjusted based on the amount of public folder data that you need to migrate.

SERVICE, SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

Perhaps even more importantly, Priasoft has taken the guess work out of public folder migrations. The Public Folder Migration and Synchronization Manager for Office 365 and Exchange reviews an organization's

Exchange Server architecture, and automatically creates a migration plan that is based on the organization's own unique environment and on Microsoft's documented best practices. Based on this information, the tool will determine the number of public folder mailboxes that should be created, and will structure the public folders within those mailboxes accordingly. In doing so, the tool will ensure that public folder mailboxes are not filled beyond 50 percent capacity.

Although Priasoft's migration technology is impressive, the real game changer is the service, support, education, and guidance that Priasoft provides to its customers. Priasoft

wants its customers to have a good migration experience, and has therefore committed itself to doing everything that it can to help guide its customers through the entire migration process, from planning to completion.

Priasoft Public Folder Migration and Synchronization Manager for Office 365 and Exchange is included with the Priasoft Migration Suite, but can also be licensed separately.



Find out more: www.priasoft.com

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