CLOUD INTRANET SOLUTIONS WITH OFFICE 365

PRODUCED BY THE CONSULTING TEAMS AT UNILY AND BRIGHTSTARR

www.unily.com
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Office 365 is becoming an increasingly popular choice as an intranet or digital workplace platform. We see two reasons for this; existing Office 365 customers are seeing the financial benefits of utilising more of the Office 365 stack rather than just Exchange, while at the same time traditional SharePoint Server (on-premises) customers and non-Microsoft customers are seeing the benefits of utilising collaboration functionality in a subscription-based cloud model.

We’ve been supporting organisations with their digital workplace initiatives for over 10 years and Office 365 has now become the core platform we work on. Alongside our clients, we see the potential of its Cloud model for delivering a long-term digital workplace platform that can connect even the most dispersed user. With Office 365 offering a wide range of products in its suite that continues to grow and evolve, the challenge our clients often find is how to appropriately utilise the different products in their digital workplace, in a way that will provide effective and understandable collaboration functionality for users.

We’ve produced this guide to help business sponsors considering or currently using Office 365 as a digital workplace platform to not only understand its core functionality, but also how the products can work together and be enhanced through additional applications and development to deliver a unified, seamless solution for users.

All information is this guide has been developed by the BrightStarr and Unily Consulting team. Our Consultants are at the cutting-edge of designing and developing digital workplace solutions that utilise the best of Office 365. All information in this guide is correct as of February 2017.

“This guide is intended for business sponsors considering or currently using Office 365 as a digital workplace platform. Suitable for both business and technical teams, this guide will help you to not only understand Office 365 functionality but also how the products can work together and be enhanced to deliver a unified, seamless solution for users.”
MICROSOFT’S CLOUD OFFERING

The cloud is elevating internet access and capabilities like never before and has helped many enterprises transform themselves over the last five years. It has enabled convenient, on-demand access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources that can be rapidly provisioned with minimal management effort.

For the purpose of this guide, we’re looking specifically at Microsoft’s Cloud offerings including Azure and Office 365. Both have seen unprecedented growth in the last few years, with Microsoft reporting a 102% increase in Azure revenue year on year, helping the product to compete with Amazon Web Services. Commercial revenue from Office 365 also grew 54% in the fourth quarter of 2016. This growth is expected as Microsoft continue to invest to ensure that they are the go-to software services player in the enterprise market. In the world of cloud computing, there are three different approaches to cloud-based services. Here is how Microsoft’s product stack aligns with them:

**Software-as-a-Service (Office 365)**

Microsoft Office 365 is a Software-as-a-Service, providing an online version of the Microsoft Office Suite; SharePoint, Exchange, Skype and more that is hosted on Microsoft’s cloud infrastructure, enabling accessibility from any device with a network connection. Microsoft maintains the service, managing the infrastructure, network, operating systems, security, performance and line of business applications such as Exchange. All you have to do is connect to it from a desktop or mobile device.

**Platform-as-a-Service (Azure)**

The majority of Azure’s offerings fall under the PaaS category, and the list of services available is growing on a weekly basis. The model offers building blocks that allow you to architect, implement and support custom applications that can either be bespoke to an individual organisation or a reusable solution that can be packaged for commercial purposes.

The services could traditionally have been broken down into operating system services and data services in the form of Windows Azure and SQL azure. The former providing managed service-hosting capabilities with SQL Azure providing relational database services. Over time it’s not so easy to categorise the services in this way. As well as providing these core capabilities, the acquisition of other vendors and innovation out of Redmond has resulted in new services such as DocumentDB (managed NoSQL document database as a service), HDInsight (cloud Hadoop, Spark and Storm Clusters) and other Cloud Services allowing you to build highly available, infinitely scalable cloud applications and APIs. For a full list of services visit: https://azure.microsoft.com/en-gb/services/

**Infrastructure-as-a-Service (Azure)**

As well as the PaaS based offerings mentioned above, which encapsulate the majority of Azure’s offerings, one of the highest consumed areas of Azure is the IaaS offering. This is primarily comprised of Azure Virtual Machines and all supporting infrastructure (Storage, Networking, etc.), allowing you to provision Windows Server or Linux machines in the cloud from pre-defined images. This can provide the capability to build enterprise scale environments fully hosted in the cloud, or utilise networking infrastructure to extend corporate on-premises data centre capability into the cloud.

Cloud computing offerings have key benefits that make them attractive to organisations:

1. **No up-front investment in technology**
2. **Elasticity and the ability to scale up and down**
3. **Self-service provisioning and automatic de-provisioning**
4. **Application programming interfaces (APIs)**
5. **Billing and metering of service usage in a pay-as-you-go model**

As you can see from these models, cloud computing can take on various forms and can provide a myriad of different services to make up your digital workplace, each of which require different levels of engagement from parts of the organisation.

The rest of this guide will focus on Microsoft’s SaaS offering, Office 365, diving deeper into the product’s functionality and how it can be applied in the enterprise for business benefit.

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CORE OFFICE 365 SERVICES FOR THE INTRANET

Office 365 provides staff with familiar tools such as Exchange for email and the Office Suite of client applications for document creation, but also includes products that enable global collaboration, communication and business intelligence. It is these products that give Office 365 the capability to be the underlying foundations for an effective digital workplace.

Before we can discuss the most effective ways to utilise the Office 365 Suite for a digital workplace, it is firstly important to establish the key tools and outline their capabilities. Different plans and pricing are available with increasing levels of functionality.

If you are considering Office 365 for a cloud intranet solution, the applications discussed in this section will play an important part:

### Office 365 Core Functions

- Email
- Shared calendar
- File storage/sharing
- Team collaboration
- Mobile access
- Instant messaging
- Online meetings

### Office 365 Users Can Access the Following Apps

- Outlook
- Exchange Online
- Skype for Business
- SharePoint Online
- Yammer
- OneDrive for Business
- Microsoft Teams
- Delve / Office Graph
- Word
- Excel
- PowerPoint
- OneNote
- Access
SharePoint Online is an all-important tool for a cloud hosted intranet solution, helping organisations share and collaborate with colleagues, partners and customers on any device. With SharePoint Online, you can access internal sites, documents, and other information from anywhere—at the office, at home, or from a mobile device.

A big benefit of SharePoint Online is that it delivers the powerful features of SharePoint Server without the associated overhead of managing the infrastructure on your own. Flexible management options ensure that you retain the control you need to meet the compliance requirements of your organisation. SharePoint Online can be purchased as a standalone offering or as part of an Office 365 suite where you also get access to the other services listed on the previous page.

For the purpose of this guide, there are a few core capabilities of SharePoint Online that should be highlighted:

**Team Sites**

SharePoint Team Sites allow you to quickly create sites for different user groups within SharePoint and Office 365 without coding, that look great on any device. Team Sites are constructed of Web Parts which can be customised to your needs. Documents, videos, images, site activities, Yammer feeds and more can be added in a couple of clicks, with the ability to add ‘highlighted content’ such as a news rollup which will automatically and dynamically populate in that area of the page.

The home page of a SharePoint Online modern Team Site gives you immediate visibility into site activity and important documents and is a great way to communicate, connect with members and share ideas.

In 2016, Team Sites had a design and user experience overhaul, bringing them up to date and in line with other products across the stack. This stylish new design comes with improvements to Team Site’s integration with other elements of the Microsoft Stack, such a Microsoft Groups, with a new Team Site page automatically created when an Office 365 Group is created.

**Mobile App**

SharePoint Online also comes with its own mobile app for iOS and Android which allows you to stay connected to important content, sites, portals and people from across your intranet while on the go. The SharePoint mobile app works with SharePoint Online in Office 365 but is also available for SharePoint Server (2013 and 2016) on-premises and in a hybrid environment. The SharePoint Mobile App functionality can be broken down into:

- **The Sites Tab** - Frequently visited or followed Sites
- **The Links Tab** - Links to Sites and Portals curated by your admin
- **The People Tab** – Find and contact colleagues in your network
- **Search** – Search ability through Sites, Files and People
Another essential element of the Office 365 stack is Yammer, Microsoft’s only Enterprise Social Network. The global market for Enterprise Social Networking continues to grow and is forecast to reach US$4.8 billion by 2020³. This is due to ESNs proving themselves as an effective way to support private, enterprise-wide connectivity, communication and collaboration and offer improved business agility. Yammer is the market favorite ESN, enabling cross-company discussions for 85 percent of the Fortune 500⁴.

Yammer unites staff in shared digital conversations through social feeds and groups and allows faster and easier knowledge sharing across the organisation. It’s an effective engagement tool for corporate intranets if integrated well, bringing real time conversations alongside static information such as news articles, while providing sharing and commenting functionality for static content pieces. This breathes life into an intranet system while helping to provide a voice for employees across the business.

Yammer’s functionality allows organisations to:

- Communicate, share files and work together in groups organised by project or topic
- Use the Discovery feed to tap into knowledge across the organisation
- Find and build on the work of others with a smart search that delivers personalised results
- Collaborate anywhere with a secure mobile app
- Promote innovation by connecting previously siloed colleagues
- Breakdown barriers between organisational units
- Give leadership teams a view on the grass-roots business operations

⁴https://products.office.com/en-gb/yammer/yammer-activation
Groups and Teams are two of Office 365’s applications that are focused around group collaboration. Groups provides file sharing and conversation capability across virtual teams and as of late, optionally integrates with Yammer for social capability too. Office 365 Teams was released more recently and are built directly on top of Groups, providing advanced features. While offering similar capabilities, Teams has a focus on a chat-based workspace, with social feeds and email chains taking centre stage. Its overall goal is to bring together people, conversations and content, helping to create a more open digital environment that makes work visible, integrated and accessible. Microsoft Teams delivers on four core capabilities:

1. Chat
Teams provides a modern conversation experience, supporting persistent and threaded chats using Skype for Business and Email.

2. Hub for teamwork
Teams brings together Word, Excel, PPT, SharePoint, OneNote, Planner, Power BI and Delve to bring intelligent and relevant information to user’s fingertips. Teams is also built on Office 365 Groups, making it easy for people to move naturally from one collaboration tool to another.

3. Configurable for each team
Teams has rich extensibility and open APIs to allow for customisation but also includes customisable Tabs to provide quick access to important content. Notifications and updates from third-party services like Twitter can also be configured.

4. Security you can trust
Teams follows the same security principles as the rest of Office 365, providing advanced security and compliance capabilities.

Delve and the Office Graph
Relevance and intelligence is essential in the modern day digital workplace, helping users to discover new information and content. Using machine learning, the Office Graph creates a spider web style set of connections between every person and all resources. Behind the scenes it establishes these links by monitoring who you meet with, what documents you access and what areas of your Office 365 solution you frequent. Delve is the intuitive application on top of this which accesses all of this information to allow for sharper, smarter searching within your intranet solution. It serves up documents that you are most likely to be looking for based upon this data, reducing search time and thus increasing productivity. Delve can also be used to search for colleagues. If you know that ‘Dan’ was working on X document, but you don’t know where he stored it, searching for Dan will bring related documents and people that he frequently works with / on to the forefront.

Summary
From our experience creating intranet solutions on Office 365, these aforementioned applications provide the functional capabilities that are most required and requested within organisations. However, Office 365 does offer a host of other functionalities that are covered later on in this guide.

When creating an intranet solution on top of Office 365, the challenge our clients often have is understanding how to bring these applications together in order to make them accessible to users. Having more choice often makes it harder for users to understand what they should use and when. The next section of this guide aims to provide some inspiration and advice on how to utilise the Office 365 tools available to you.

We recommend presenting these to your organisation to ensure that end users understand the different use cases for the different services. This will in turn help you to understand how the services can come together to support a united intranet environment.

Up Next
Discover What Office 365 Tools to Use and When
WHICH TOOLS TO USE WHEN

A common challenge with Office 365 for use as an intranet platform is determining the best way to bring the tools together in a way that will provide value for your varying user groups. This is particularly complex due to Office 365’s continuing roadmap, with new rich features continuously added.

ANALYSING CONVERSATION TYPES THAT OCCUR ACROSS THE INTRANET

To simplify the options available, we recommend providing a common gateway to all of your Office 365 tools, such as a central intranet, where all users access and are informed of tools. This allows the business to define what elements of Office 365 to use, rather than allowing access to everything and expecting users to understand. This is often an unsuccessful strategy.

This diagram aims to help you understand when to use each of the Office 365 tools available to support the varying conversation types that occur across your organisation. With these relationships defined, it becomes clearer as to how each Office 365 tool supports different use cases that occur around your digital workplace.

**1:1 Communication (1:1)**
A private one on one conversation that takes place between two people

**1:Many Communication (1:M)**
A communication from an individual to a group of users

**Many:Many Communication (M:M)**
A collaborative conversation involving a group of users with no single owner
SharePoint Sites saw some valuable updates in 2016 in terms of their functionality and user experience, bringing them in line with the other tools in the Office 365 set. These advancements have not only improved its capability as a tool for Many:Many relationships with SharePoint Publishing and Traditional Team Sites, its new Team News functionality and Mobile App have created new use case possibilities for 1:Many conversations.

SharePoint Publishing/Traditional Team sites are still highly customisable and can be branded, making them suitable for more long-term projects and teams that require a variety of tools. These sites have rich content publishing and a true document management system with versioning control and workflows. For example, an HR team could use a SharePoint site to manage the production of new policy documents. Different members of the team can be alerted of a new task in SharePoint, requesting them to review and approve a number of new policy documents. The team can use the SharePoint Site to get a wider view of the project, view tasks assigned to the rest of the team, view supporting files and work collaboratively on the new policy document.

SharePoint Team News

The new SharePoint Team News provides a more suitable platform for 1:Many communication, providing lightweight content publishing to departments or divisions within an organisation. For example, an Operations team could use SharePoint Team news to share daily updates on activity that is occurring specifically within their local team. Junior members of the team are empowered to publish news without support, with all articles accessible and designed to work on any device. As personalisation and branding is not a possibility, it is important to consider how these Team News Sites would fit into your overall internal communications strategy.
Office 365 Groups further supports the Yammer use case by providing a location for users within a special interest group or team to come together and share files. As Yammer and Groups become more closely knit, their functionalities do overlap. However, Groups can act as the archive of information to support a Yammer Group or as a standalone collaboration site. It can provide any team with a simplistic way to share files and collaborate, without having to produce a SharePoint Site.

Yammer All Company Messaging
Due to its open format, Yammer makes an excellent platform for 1:Many communications, for example as the primary channel for micro-blogging activity from key individuals such as the CEO. The CEO could support the latest all-company meeting by posting a piece of relevant communication through Yammer at the close of the session, inspiring further conversation and interaction with commenting and liking capabilities.

Yammer Groups
The Yammer platform also offers a suitable channel for Many:Many conversations, with the ability to create private or public Groups which can focus around a particular specialist subject. Members of the Yammer Group can participate in conversations, share documents and media, take part in polls and more. For example, a Yammer Group could be setup by a Marketing team to consolidate conversations around new branding guidelines, taking the conversation out of email and making it more accessible. External users can be added in to the conversation, allowing teams to easily gather feedback and ideas from across the organisation in an informal way. These conversations can be formalised with integration with Office 365 Groups, allowing you to surface and store documents in a more accessible location.

OneDrive for Business
In comparison to a SharePoint Site where documents are viewable by multiple users with the appropriate permissions, OneDrive for Business offers personal file storage. OneDrive for Business best supports the 1:1 scenario if you are working on a personal blog or insight article and require feedback. Colleagues can be granted access on an ad-hoc basis to view and comment, ensuring total privacy.
Skype for Business Instant Messaging

Skype for Business best supports the 1:1 scenario if you are looking for real-time conversations and immediate responses. Users can search for colleagues or customers from within the app and conversations can occur immediately. A suitable use case for Instant Messaging would be if you require a rapid answer from a colleague working in another location. Rather than waiting for an email with no guarantee of reply, you are able to check their Status through Skype for Business and if online, speak to them in real-time, helping to improve efficiency.

Skype for Business Broadcasting

Skype for Business also supports the 1:Many scenario with Broadcasting functionality. Led by a single owner or used as a platform for real-time group conversation, Skype for Business allows for real time voice, video and content. This could be used to enable the CEO to conduct an all-company meeting, allowing users to sign-in from various locations and watch and participate in a meeting occurring thousands of miles away. Broadcasting could also be used to support external client calls, providing a secure channel for voice and video.

Understanding the different use case examples for each of the core Office 365 services will help you align each tool to a particular business process. This makes it easier to inform the business of when and where to use each tool.

Our advice to our clients has always been to not be afraid of the choice available from Office 365. Despite there being tools which share similar functionality, each has a place and fills requirements for the complex and varying conversations that take place across your organisation.

UP NEXT

HOW TO BRING IT ALL TOGETHER
BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now you have a solid understanding of how each Office 365 tool can support particular use cases, you can start to understand how these can be brought together to form a cohesive digital workplace.

As mentioned previously, it’s essential to provide a common gateway to the Office 365 tools to help guide usage. The next level is not just having a gateway, but providing a centralised intranet which further integrates with tools and information from Office 365, intrinsically bringing it all together. This is where the value add comes from, helping to immerse users in the platform rather than linking off to external applications with separate experiences.

In this section we’re providing some practical examples of how you can further integrate Office 365 with an intranet solution, helping you to visualise how this could look. The examples shown here are taken from our Office 365 intranet product, Unily, which is a culmination of our Office 365 intranet expertise. Hosted and developed on top of Azure, Unily’s custom experiences integrate seamlessly with the Office 365 suite including SharePoint Online, OneDrive for Business, Yammer, Delve, Skype for Business and more. These examples should provide inspiration and clarity on how the multitude of Office 365 tools can be brought into one intranet experience.
Unily is the powerful intranet-as-a-service from award-winning consultancy BrightStarr. Designed from the ground up to improve global connectivity, Unily incorporates the Office 365 tools into a seamless, united intranet for your workforce. After a decade of custom intranet engagements, we recognised that most organisations have similar core requirements. Unily incorporates them all—and much more—in a unique product that can be launched in weeks.

Learn more at www.unily.com
INTRANET HOMEPAGE

1. Make collaboration sites accessible and organised by linking to SharePoint Sites, Groups and Teams from a central place on the intranet. On Unily for example, sites can be organised via the Workspaces dropdown. For an added benefit, allow users to personalise the sites they require access to for added efficiency.

2. Highlight engaging rich-media on your intranet by embedding Office 365 Video across your intranet. This brings relevant content to the forefront of your intranet, rather than users having to search across various services to find what they’re looking for.

3. Keep employees up to date by integrating the Office 365 Calendar with your intranet Events. This helps employees stay aware of events occurring across the organisation, while keeping it personal to them.

4. Bring documents to your end-users’ fingertips by surfacing documents across the intranet, such as Trending Documents on the homepage. This could surface the most viewed documents from across OneDrive and SharePoint that users have permissions to see.

5. Highlight your most engaged employees and inspire usage of the intranet through a Top Contributors widgets, populated based on most interaction and participation on Yammer.
INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

1. Empower users to participate and engage with communications by bringing dynamic conversation into static news articles with Yammer integration across your intranet. Yammer can be used to support commenting, liking and sharing functionality seamlessly synced back to the All Company feed or a designated Yammer Group.

2. Enable easy personalisation and relevancy by utilising SharePoint meta-data to tag content across your internal communications. This allows users to personalise the content that appears on the intranet and helps to keep your content structured and findable.

3. Improve the flow of knowledge through suggested News articles that are personal to users throughout your internal communications which could be surfaced from SharePoint Team news.

Microsoft rolls out new plans for Office 365 users

By Jack Robertson - 30 August 2017 - Lily Lives - 3

Microsoft has launched new plans for subscription-based service Office 365 that the company says are designed to better meet the needs of business users.

Available as of Thursday, the three new plans are called Office 365 Business Essentials, Office 365 Business and Office 365 Business Premium. According to a Microsoft blog post, the new plans are geared toward businesses with anywhere from one to more than 250 employees and replace the previous Small Business, Small Business Premium and Mobile Office Business plans with three new plans.

The goal was to simplify and beef up plans available by cutting prices on one of the plans and increasing the number of users allowed on a two of the plans. Microsoft also tried to increase more options for social networking, mobile devices and cloud-based services. Since unveiling Office 365 in 2011, the software giant has been trying to push more users, especially business users, to adopt the service as an alternative to the traditional licensing Office suite.

We made these changes in response to feedback from our customers and as part of our longstanding commitment to bring the benefits of cloud-based productivity to every SMB (small and midsize business), Microsoft says in its blog.

White-accrediting, paste links, or upload images

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PEOPLE DIRECTORY AND PROFILES

1. Give employees a face on the intranet with rich people profiles which can be integrated with Office 365 Profiles, bringing contact information straight into your intranet.

2. Improve findability by utilising SharePoint meta data to tag users’ profiles with Skills, Locations and Departments. These meta data options can then be searched within your central people directory, helping users find colleagues to help with a particular project.

3. Help your users discover new people in their network with Office Graph integration within the People Directory, prioritising contacts which are most relevant to your team members.

4. Allow for instant connectivity across global teams with Skype for Business integration with people profiles. Users can search for a colleague with a particular skill and connect with them in one click.
ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKING

1. **Make social channels understandable** with Yammer Feeds and Groups accessible directly from within the intranet. This can dramatically improve uptake of Social channels as they are used holistically across the intranet. Social notifications can also be integrated into your intranet, alerting users to new conversations, new replies and new interactions with their posts.

2. **Help social networking to be at the heart of your intranet** with social widgets embedded across the intranet. As well as having a central social feed and integration with internal communication, social feeds and social groups can be embedded on collaboration sites such as on Unily Tribes or Unily Sites.
CLOUD INTRANET SOLUTIONS WITH OFFICE 365

APPS AND TOOLS

Help employees to make the choice of tools available to them with Apps and Tools integration, simply linking to the Office 365 tools which you are mandating across the organisation. This helps users to understand which tools can support the work they’re doing, rather than accessing all of the Office 365 tools via the Office 365 Suite.

COLLABORATION SITES

1. Improve user experience of SharePoint Sites by giving them a consistent user interface. Apply custom branding and styling to your SharePoint Sites to ensure they have a consistent navigation, allowing people to easily move between SharePoint Sites and the rest of the intranet without a dramatic change in experience.

2. Allow users to personalise the sites they need most access to by allowing them to add the SharePoint Sites they follow in the footer of the intranet.
Bring together the varying Office 365 document tools from OneDrive for Business and SharePoint by surfacing all document types in a centralised documents directory within the intranet. Increase the findability of files with an enhanced search while upholding security trimmings. With integration with Office 365 Web Apps, documents can be collaborated on and viewed with one click.

Encourage users to store documents within Office 365 by allowing users to upload files from the central document repository, choosing the SharePoint Site or location where they would like the file to be stored.

Help users discover new documents and information with Delve integration within the document repository. Documents could be filtered by a Delve tab, surfacing the items which are most relevant and popular within users networks. By bringing this functionality directly within the intranet and making it contextual, users find it easier to adopt and understand the value each tool can bring.

Engage users on the move with a consistent mobile experience allowing them to access all of their Office 365 tools via the intranet app. Don’t rely on users to download each of the Office 365 apps individually such as SharePoint and OneDrive which can have differing user experiences.

UP NEXT
OFFICE 365 SERVICES THAT TAKE THE INTRANET FURTHER
CLOUD INTRANET SOLUTIONS WITH OFFICE 365

ADDITIONAL OFFICE 365 TOOLS TAKING INTRANET FURTHER

Once you’ve established the core of your intranet, Office 365’s multitude of tools can help you take your intranet even further. Here’s a brief intro into some of the other Office 365 tools which can support your enterprise.
Microsoft currently offers two video hosting services which will eventually converge into one; Office 365 Video and Stream. Microsoft Stream allows users to upload, share, tag and discover videos across the organisation. Microsoft handle the storage and security elements, taking the work out of the management process.

Planner

Planner enables organisations to structure team tasks easily and improve productivity. Teams can create plans in a board style, enabling you to organise, assign and collaborate on tasks, set due dates, update statuses and share files, while visual dashboards and email notifications keep everyone informed on progress. Integration with OneDrive, Office 365 Groups and Teams helps to connect Planner to the rest of the Office 365 services.

Power BI

Power BI is a cloud-based suite of business analytics tools that enables anyone to connect to, visualise, and analyse data with greater speed, efficiency, and understanding. It connects users to a broad range of live data through easy-to-use dashboards, provides interactive reports, and delivers compelling visualisations that bring data to life.

PowerApps is an enterprise service for innovators everywhere to connect, create and share business apps with your team on any device in minutes, helping to unlock new business agility. Employees can quickly create apps that work on any device using templates to get started quickly and a visual designer to automate workflows, when integrated with Flow. Built-in connectors enable you to connect PowerApps to other cloud services such as Dynamics CRM, Dropbox or On-premises systems, helping anyone in your organisation to unlock new business agility. Apps can be shared in seconds in a similar way that documents are shared, by typing in a co-workers email address. PowerApps could be used for a multitude of purposes such as a recruiting app for a team, to a mobile app for banking employees that connects to their CRM data.

Sway

Sway is Microsoft’s digital story telling app, allowing you to easily create interactive, web-based pages or presentations from your phone or browser. The purpose of Sway is to convey concepts quickly, easily and clearly. Unlike PowerPoint, it is primarily for presenting ideas on-screen rather than to an audience. Tutorials, topic introductions and interactive reports are the sort of things to which it lends itself.

Sway presentations are backed-up to the cloud, and can be easily shared or embedded in websites.

Project Online

Project Online is a flexible online solution for project portfolio management (PPM) and everyday work. Delivered through Office 365, Project Online provides powerful project management capabilities for planning, prioritising, and managing projects and project portfolio investments — from almost anywhere on almost any device. Project Online can be used by administrators, portfolio managers and viewers, project and resource managers, and team leads and members.

Dynamics 365

Microsoft Dynamics 365 is a new service that integrates Microsoft’s Dynamics CRM system with ERP transactional data as well as with Office 365 data to give sales people greater data intelligence about customer records in terms of customer transactions, customer behavior and customer preferences.

UP NEXT

BENEFITS, CHALLENGES AND A HYBRID APPROACH TO CLOUD ADOPTION
BENEFITS OF USING OFFICE 365 FOR INTRANET

Using Office 365 as an intranet platform has a host of benefits; giving your workforce access to leading enterprise tools, making technology more accessible and making your workforce more agile.

Cost

When comparing an Office 365 intranet project against a SharePoint Server intranet project, there are some significant cost benefits. The first reduction in cost in an intranet scenario is that there is no need to manage and maintain the infrastructure of the solution. You simply pay a subscription per user for access to an Office 365 account and all the back end of the solution is taken care of for you. This means a SaaS Intranet solution requires a much lower initial outlay.

To deliver a valuable intranet solution on Office 365, some customisation is essential. You could pay a comparable price to customise an Office 365 intranet as you would an on-premises intranet such as one built on SharePoint 2016, but your initial outlay would be reduced. This is due to infrastructure and hosting considerations usually associated with an on-premises solution, able to be bypassed. Furthermore, a variety of turnkey intranet solution are now offered on Office 365, such as our intranet product Unily. By adopting a turnkey intranet solution such as Unily, your development costs are once again diminished as you are able to take advantage of a fully-featured intranet solution straight out of the box.

Another cost benefit is that Office 365 is not just comprised of SharePoint, it is bundled with a huge variety of other enterprise tools which would be a considerable outlay to invest in individually. Often, organisations invest in Office 365 purely for Exchange for email services. The return on investment from Office 365 is dramatically improved if it is also used as an intranet solution, utilising the myriad of tools available for the same subscription costs.

Future-proof

The classic challenge with on-premises solutions is the inevitable need to upgrade to the newest version once the system you are using becomes too out dated to use. This is the problem that Office 365 aims to solve. By investing in an Office 365 intranet, you are guaranteeing your organisation access to the latest and greatest feature sets from Microsoft free of charge, rather than having to invest a significant outlay to purchase the latest version of SharePoint Server. It is important to consider that there will be occasions when customisation is required to help users derive value from new Microsoft functionality, but this staggered, agile way of improving your solution is a much more manageable and predictable investment, as opposed to the capital needed to create a workable SharePoint Server solution.

By adopting a solution such as Unily which utilises the best of Office 365, your ROI from Office 365 becomes even greater as Unily has a continuous roadmap of new features and functionality which work in synergy with Office 365’s roadmap, making new features accessible for users.

Internal IT Resource

By adopting a SaaS cloud intranet, the platform for your entire system is managed by your service provider, inevitably freeing up your internal IT team’s time and resource that has traditionally been spent monitoring and maintaining the intranet platform. Microsoft Office 365 has 99.9% uptime guarantee and thousands of support staff on hand to ensure that once you go live, you have the solid infrastructure and skills to keep your platform stable.

Speed

Traditionally, intranet development projects can take years, with 18 months being the average duration for a project to successfully deliver a bespoke intranet on SharePoint on-premises. This is due to the infrastructure and functionality being built from the ground-up. With Office 365, this initial infrastructure process is bypassed. Furthermore, by implementing a turnkey intranet solution such as Unily which is hosted on the cloud, a complete intranet solution can be connected to your Office 365 instance, allowing you to deploy a complete solution that delivers 80% of commonly asked for intranet functionality in just weeks.
Security

This concern is obviously significant in the minds of IT professionals, and yet when considered in its entirety and in the scope of the potential partners out there to work with on cloud based solutions, it could be unwarranted.

First, you must ask yourself:

1. What is your yearly budget on digital asset security?
2. How large is your digital security team?

When we consider what Microsoft’s budget and manpower is in this space, their spending and effort in securing their cloud solutions is likely to be far greater than your own. With this level of investment there is very little chance that you will find services more secure than theirs. They have already made large gains in this space to help keep your cloud as secure as possible. One such example being the inclusion of multi factor authentication for Office 365, meaning that a code can be sent to your mobile for you to log in to your Office 365 account with. Microsoft invests in the best security partners and has thereby achieved the highest attainable credibility ranking for information security management via SafeNet.

The main issue with cloud security that actually poses a significant threat is not the technology itself, whether that be a cloud or on-premises intranet solution. It is actually the human element of that interaction with the solution. Sensitive data usage guidelines and an appropriate permissions architecture must be put in place to counteract this risk. With a governance structure in place that defines access and security permissions set out from the start, security can be maintained and regulated effectively.

Scalability

One of the great things about an Office 365 intranet solution, and in fact any cloud based service, is that the subscription nature of your payments provides a certain amount of scalability in your solution. Scaling on-premises with anything other than a routine addition becomes a project. This generates not only incremental hardware costs, but also additional IT employee time requirements. This all means that additional IT cannot simply be turned on at the flick of a switch or the click of a mouse. Moving to a cloud solution gives you the ability to add to the platform on a virtually instantaneous basis.

The immediacy of a cloud intranet is not simply a luxury but allows enterprises to remove barriers to business change, such as speeding the assimilation of business units acquired. This adds agility to the business so that it exploits opportunities it sees faster, and delivers on synergy gains from business purchases quicker, in order to satisfy shareholder value pressures.

Mobility and Access

One of the single greatest benefits of a cloud based intranet solution, such as Unily is the ability to be able to access your intranet solution from anywhere in the world that you can get stable internet access. Scenarios such as travel time and working from on-site locations or in partner or client offices are no longer an issue. You can reach the Cloud via any internet access point at any time, and the resources you need are on hand in just a few clicks of a button. Microsoft continue to make investment in Office 365’s user experience on mobile, ensuring that services like Skype for Business, Office Web Apps, SharePoint, Yammer and more look and function intuitively on mobile devices. Unily helps to bring these mobile experiences together, with responsive design for all browsers and native mobile applications for iOS, Android and Windows.
There are challenges that are cited by those against adopting cloud based intranet solutions. Some are legitimate concerns but others can be overcome with a balanced and information driven understanding of the nature of the challenge, such as security risks, as discussed earlier.

**Integration with existing systems**
One thing that must always be considered when adopting any cloud service is how it may or may not effectively integrate with your existing IT systems. On-premises solutions can be easier to integrate with existing platforms and technologies due to the nature of the technology being on site and accessible at all times. With cloud solutions, you might find that there are more barriers between your intranet solution in Office 365 and your other IT systems. The reality is that with a good partner in place and a proper and fully formed cloud adoption strategy, there are a number of ways to overcome this small difficulty for a complete and full integration of any cloud intranet solution with existing IT.

**User experience**
This is possibly one of the most overlooked issues with taking on cloud services. You want the IT experience for your employees to be a seamless one, whereby as they navigate various pieces of your IT infrastructure they unnoticeably switch between the various pieces of functionality hosted in the cloud and on-premises without a tangible difference. Incongruous systems can reduce quality of experience, thereby reducing engagement and adoption of any given solution.

With this in mind it is important to plan for this early so that a consistent and coherent user experience is designed into the solution from the outset. This process can be simplified by deploying a ready-made intranet product such as Unily which seamlessly connects your Office 365 products into a united solution that can be branded and designed to look like your own.

**Migration**
Migration is possibly the biggest challenge for businesses today looking to move to the cloud and this can be for any number of reasons. The first and most obvious would be that at enterprise level, switching thousands of employees over from one set of systems to another is not an instantaneously achievable thing. It takes time, training and organisation. There will be old systems that need to be transitioned to the new platform and there will be new systems to replace old ones, but one instant switch can bring things crashing down around you. Acclimation time is really important for all employees.

A solid choice in partner can help alleviate this difficulty by helping you devise a migration plan that suits your organisation down to the ground. Your migration must be planned and the right experts can execute your plan without a hitch.
A hybrid intranet offers a stable and effective way of taking on a migration to the cloud, while mitigating risk. A hybrid system is one that uses both on-premises and cloud services to deliver an integrated solution. It in effect combines a private traditional system, with a publically hosted cloud instance. For some clients, and projects, it offers the best of both worlds.

Why use a Hybrid approach?

Some of the more common reasons for a hybrid approach include:

• You have existing SharePoint and on-premises investments you want to leverage

• Specific business needs require customisation of SharePoint that cannot be completed in the cloud

• You have some data that you cannot, or do not want to put in the cloud

• You have large amounts of data, and it may be more cost effective to store it on-premises

Hybrid Search

To provide a seamless experience for end-users, it’s really important to be able to surface content from on-premises applications such as SharePoint Server 2010 or 2013, in Office 365 applications such as Unily and SharePoint Online.

Hybrid Search enables us to do this. Microsoft supports a unified index in the cloud, providing a single entry point and result set for search queries, allowing users to find content they need regardless of where it’s stored.

Some of the key features of this Hybrid search capability are:

• Ability to crawl various content sources such as SharePoint 2010, File shares and other line of business applications using Business Connectivity Services and deliver a unified search index in SharePoint Online.

• The unified search index can be consumed by search queries submitted both from SharePoint Online and SharePoint on-premises environments.

• A “geo-crawl” capability is provided allowing multiple farms in different global locations to be crawled and feed the single search index hosted in SharePoint Online, resulting in a unified and consistent search experience for all end users regardless of where they search from.

• A secure search experience is ensured by encrypting parsed content and metadata that is stored in the SharePoint Online Index before it leaves your on-premises environment, and ensuring security principals defined on-premises are reflected in the SharePoint Online index.

Unily takes direct advantage of the Hybrid Search capabilities described above, aggregating content from various sources across a Hybrid environment, yet providing users with a single unified experience. Learn more at www.unily.com.
OUR CONCLUSION

We hope this guide has provided you with a conclusive understanding of what Office 365 can offer for an intranet environment, helping you to formulate your own digital workplace plans. To conclude, here are our five key takeaways for a successful Office 365 intranet.

1. CONSIDER WHICH TOOLS YOU WANT TO USE FROM OFFICE 365

   It’s important to first understand the nature of each of the Office 365 tools and decide what is right for your own unique organisation. Not every tool will add value to your business and trying to incorporate too much can have a negative impact on adoption and engagement. Work with a diverse team from across the business to gather requirements for your intranet and address how each can be met with Office 365 tools and which can not.

2. GIVE YOURSELF A CENTRAL LAUNCH PAD

   Once you have chosen the tools for your users, give them a central launch pad to access them. This can not only be used to advise on how to use the tools, it will also help manage the choice that is available. Provide links to your various applications from a central place on the intranet, such as on the homepage. This can be split into Office 365 applications and external applications for clarity for users. Allowing your users to personalise the applications they see front and centre will also help to keep the intranet relevant to them.
3. PROVIDE CONSISTENT USER EXPERIENCES

Improve the flow of movement between applications by ensuring a consistent navigation across all. This can start with including a singular navigation across all Office 365 products such as SharePoint Sites. This stops users getting stuck in particular apps and helps to bring the Office 365 tools into your overall Information Architecture. Ensure your look and feel and branding is applied to any Office 365 tools you can, helping to ensure consistency across the site.

4. INTEGRATE WHERE POSSIBLE

In order to help your users consume the Office 365 services in an appropriate way that adds value, it’s important to integrate where possible. We recommend bringing the tools together into a united intranet solution as we have done in our Unily intranet product. Not only will this drive consumption of Office 365 services which can be seamlessly integrated, it helps users understand the context of when and where to use each service.

5. BE AGILE

When tackling an Office 365 intranet, it’s important to remain agile and not take on too much at once. Work with your user base to understand the initial requirements and consider that Phase 1. All secondary functionality can be determined once you are up and running with a stable base. Working in this agile way will make it easier for your organisation to accept Office 365, which will fundamentally change and adapt over time due to its as-a-service nature. Adopting an intranet product such as Unily can make this easier, providing a starting point for your intranet and integrating new Office 365 features as they are released by Microsoft.

“Work with a diverse team from across the business to gather requirements for your intranet and address how each can be met with Office 365 tools and which can not.”
HOW CAN UNILY HELP WITH YOUR DIGITAL WORKPLACE STRATEGY?

Unily is the Intranet as a Service solution that brings the high quality digital experiences of the consumer world to the employee intranet. Unily is cloud, mobile and social at heart, and can be deployed in just weeks. Completely scalable, flexible and with a Digital Workplace attitude, Unily is the solution of choice for those organisations looking to seamlessly integrate their internal systems together for a truly connected workplace. Fully supported and complete with upgrades and updates all as part of the package, Unily is the future proof intranet solution to kick-start your Digital Workplace strategy. Unily is owned and operated by BrightStarr, an award-winning technology consultancy and Microsoft Gold Partner.

www.unily.com

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