VCG Knowledge

Optimising
your Microsoft services

How to improve value, security and efficiency in your business

A world of perpetual transformation

Workstyle changes, accelerated by the pandemic, have supercharged the demand for cloud services, and although new 'hybrid' working practices enhance flexibility, they do create new challenges.

Enabling your workforce with the right applications is critical if the business is to succeed, but the dangers of both over-provisioning and under-utilising services can be costly.

This eGuide helps small and medium sized companies to manage and optimise their Microsoft licensing costs and services.

"Even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."

Will Rogers

Why Microsoft?

Throughout the digital workplace evolution Microsoft has been a leading player, and its 'Office' services continue to be trusted and liked by the public sector and private enterprise.

Advancements in collaboration, Azure cloud services, security, and artificial intelligence (AI) mean Microsoft's position as a leading solutions provider is assured.

Complexities around licensing remain a headache for IT departments, with the same underlying questions:

- **Are we making the most of Microsoft investments, digital services, and data?**
- **Costs seem high - are we paying for things we don't need?**
- **Is there a smarter, more flexible way to manage our licensing requirements?**

Microsoft licensing - the devil is in the detail

Anyone who's dealt with licensing before will know that there are mind-boggling options and opportunities in the complex world of Microsoft.

Business leaders and IT managers have enough to contend with running core operations, let alone having to grapple with the complexities of appropriate and cost-effective licenses.

Bewildering package plans can be incredibly difficult and time consuming to understand; many companies fall into the trap of agreeing to 'trail licensing' options, which then become converted to costly 'business as usual' arrangements, leading to oversubscribed and costly services that are not required.

Three key questions

Small to medium sized businesses should ask

Office 365 'Business' subscriptions start at around £5 per user month for basic plans rising to over £15 per month for the premium service, with a host of options in between.

Key question

'Does this provide sufficient security and sophistication for today's tech savvy users?'

Enterprise E3 and E5 packages are fully loaded and provide best in class productivity tools with advanced security and compliance, but annual commitment costs start at around £30 per user per month, and rise to around £50.

Key question

'If this puts a large dent in the IT budget, can a service provider help reduce it?'

Whilst Microsoft have tried to simplify plan options in tabular form, the devil is in the detail, the only way to fully realise best value is to have day to day 'forensic' involvement.

Key question

'Working with a licensing specialist is virtually self funding, so can a quick assessment help us review our setup and costs?'

There are many tariff options and plans that are not publicised or promoted - knowing how to find and blend these options is the key to implementing competitive licensing packages.

By way of example, the option to use different plans across Business and Enterprise tariffs in the same organisation is not adequately explained or understood, leaving many to assume that they have to take a 'one size fits all' option for their workforce.

Tailoring plans to suit individuals or job groups will lower monthly costs, and the blunt measurement of using 300 users to determine whether you are a Business or an Enterprise account should be disregarded.

For most users, only 45-65% of the features in an E3 or E5 option are utilised, and as such an MS 365 or Office 365 E3 option can often be replaced by combining a 'Business' plan with one or more 'add-on' licenses to provide the specific functionality required.

The use of additional 'Apps' packages can be applied to many plans to radically reduce costs without any loss of services or functionality. Microsoft are also about to tighten and restrict licensing flexibility, making it more difficult to cost effectively manage fluctuations in user numbers.

Why pay for more than you need?

Many organisations are paying for services they don't need or use, and with increasing demands for agility, security, and access to systems at any time and from any device, organisations should re-examine what they have, prior to investing in additional services.

Business plan subscriptions that only use email, Teams, SharePoint, OneDrive, and Office applications are almost certainly not maximising the services they are paying for.

Companies utilising Secure Score assessments and applying those recommendation to their Teams environment, along with Azure Active Directory (AAD) are moving in the right direction.

And, if AAD reporting is enabled, and you're proactively checking compliance along with Multifactor Authentication (MFA) and self-service password resets, then it's a sign that you're getting there.

Automating workflows with Power Automate; using Sway to create interactive and compelling content; and using Delve, Yammer and Viva for data visualisation, documentation, social networking and machine learning suggests you're definitely in the value for money zone.

As with all things, it's a 'horses for courses' scenario and there's absolutely no need to pay for services you're not using.

Is it time for a health check?

Commercial and security consultation

Leaving aside the wider subject of cyber security, which is covered by us in a separate eGuide, there's an assumption by some that Microsoft Office 365 is inherently secure 'out of the box'.

This isn't the case, and whilst there are built-in security features, the system needs to be correctly set up for maximum protection.

The intricacies of licensing and ability to set up commercial plans to provide the required services and flexibility are challenging to implement without regular, day to day involvement in the subject matter detail.

In almost all situations, a health check by one of our Microsoft specialists will lower operating costs and improve system security.

Typical areas missed include:

• **Allowing anonymous access to meetings**

• **Best practice authentication processes that are not fully implemented.**

• **User profile permissions and access levels not correctly set up.**

• **Weak email security rules deployed, heightening cyber-attack vulnerability.**

• **Unrestricted third-party application integration misuse**

Are you ready to optimise?

Working with a partner like VCG to examine and refine your Microsoft licensing landscape ensures that you only pay for the services you need.

Typical results from work done with existing clients save on average 48% from annual Microsoft spend, and we'd be happy to go through some examples with you.

With increased employee demands for flexible working and planned changes to way the way Microsoft licensing works, we'd encourage you to talk to us about maximising your IT investment.

For more information

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