Managing the Microsoft Cloud: The Next Frontier for IT Management and Security for MSPs
INTRODUCTION

The Explosive Growth of the Microsoft Cloud

While the Microsoft cloud is not a specific product, for the purposes of this whitepaper, when we say “Microsoft Cloud” we are referring to the combination of Microsoft’s Azure public cloud infrastructure and its ubiquitous business application suite, Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365), which has built-in cloud services, cloud mail and cloud storage.

- In the last two years, Microsoft Azure’s SMB market share has grown from 32 percent to 46 percent.
- Office 365 is used by over a million companies worldwide as their main productivity software, with close to 600,000 companies in the U.S. alone opting for the software.¹
- When Azure usage is combined with the data for Microsoft 365, the Microsoft Cloud tops the list of cloud services being actively used by SMBs worldwide.²
- Also, adoption rates for Azure for the enterprises increased from 60 percent in 2019 to 69 percent in 2020. Around 36 percent of the enterprises spend a sizable $1.2 million or more on Azure every year.³

Industry experts indicate that cloud services are the definitive future of computing. Both enterprises as well as SMBs are prioritizing cloud migration and cloud-first policies and spending more on cloud services than ever before.

In the current economic climate, businesses are leveraging the power of cloud computing due to its ease of access, economy and scalability. The advantages of the cloud have proven to be especially significant as businesses across the globe have had to make organization-wide transitions to remote work in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.
BENEFITS FOR SMBS DRIVING THE GROWTH OF MICROSOFT 365

Significant Reduction in IT Costs

Migration to cloud computing facilitates a significant reduction in the expenses associated with managing and maintaining IT infrastructure. Instead of spending capital on expensive on-premises IT equipment and systems, organizations can use the cloud resources offered by cloud service providers and reduce operational costs.

Companies can save on IT costs in the following ways:

- No longer having to pay for system upgrades, new software and hardware since all of it might be included in the cloud services contract.
- Significant reduction in on-premises energy consumption costs.
- No longer needing a team of experts to manage IT infrastructure and saving on employee wages.

Better and More Efficient Collaboration

Cloud computing simplifies and streamlines collaboration and allows teams to communicate and work together more smoothly. With cloud computing, organizations can give employees, contractors and third-parties quick access to the data they require to work on projects.

Team members can both view as well as share information more efficiently and securely across a cloud-based platform. There are certain cloud services providers that offer collaborative social spaces for employees from across the company to easily connect with one another and promote cross-team engagement.
Business Continuity

Keeping IT systems and data secure is a crucial aspect of efficient business continuity planning. Regardless of whether a business is faced with a power failure, a natural calamity or any other crisis, data stored on the cloud is fully backed up and well protected in a highly secure location. Cloud storage enables organizations to quickly access and retrieve data to minimize downtime and get the business up and running again without any significant loss in productivity.

Scalability

Adopting cloud services enables companies to achieve easy and efficient scalability to suit their changing needs. IT operational and storage requirements can easily scale up or down based on business needs in this fluctuating global economic environment. Since cloud services providers manage all the software upgrades, companies do not have to bear the expenses of purchasing and deploying them on their own. Switching to cloud computing frees up time for IT technicians so they can focus on more strategic, revenue-generating tasks and drive business growth and profitability.

Flexibility

Switching to cloud services enables businesses to provide more flexibility to their employees. Regardless of whether employees need to access data on the go, on an overseas vacation or while working from home, cloud computing provides quick and easy off-site access to a virtual office. As such, this provides employees the flexibility to work as and when needed.

Automatic Updates for Greater Security

Timely software updates are key to maintaining the security of an organization’s systems and networks. Cloud computing allows automatic updates based on your IT requirements. These automatic updates can include upgrades in computer processing power and servers as well as up-to-date software versions.
HOW COVID-19 ADDED ROCKET FUEL TO THE GROWTH

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses across the globe were forced to switch to full-scale remote work in order to continue operations. It goes without saying that at no other point in time has cloud computing taken on such unprecedented significance or unleashed its full potential.

Companies around the world are now tapping the instant availability of IT resources that the cloud facilitates to maintain business continuity as many continue to work from home. The cloud has transformed communication and connectivity between businesses and people on a global scale.

It would be nearly impossible for businesses to deal with the global pandemic if the cloud didn’t exist. Without the cloud at their disposal, businesses would face the gargantuan challenge of running their everyday operations and collaborating, sharing data information, maintaining data security and so on with their remote workforces.

Given the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, more companies recognize the enormous potential of the cloud and allocating larger budgets to leverage the technology. In a way, it could be said that the COVID-19 outbreak has single-handedly fueled the growth and extensive adoption of the cloud worldwide.
RISKS AND ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH MICROSOFT 365

Under the shared responsibility model, Microsoft takes ownership of platform security. However, the O365 customers themselves are responsible for the safe and compliant use of the app. The risk isn’t the cloud services provider, it’s the users.

Security

Although Microsoft takes stringent measures to provide service-level security for O365 apps, these merely protect Microsoft’s cloud-based apps from unauthorized intrusion. Users can still perform high-risk actions within these applications, whether accidental or malicious. In addition to this, account credentials can also be acquired via phishing scams and used by third parties to gain access to corporate data. With just a few clicks, an employee can share an entire folder containing sensitive data with another user within the company or outside it.

Taken together, the average organization experiences 2.7 threats each month within Microsoft 365, including:

- 1.3 compromised accounts each month — such as an unauthorized third party logging in to a corporate Microsoft 365 account using stolen credentials.
- 0.8 insider threats each month — such as users downloading sensitive data from SharePoint Online and taking it with them when they join a competitor.
- 0.6 privileged user threats each month — such as an administrator provisioning excessive permissions to a user relative to their role.
Compliance

In the cloud era, the challenge is not only protecting sensitive information against internal and external threats, but retaining the same compliance policy enforcement you would have for on-premises applications. As an MSP, it is important for you to document what's up in the cloud, even for smaller clients. So, if someone makes changes to important settings, you should have an audit trail that shows you what changed, what it was like before and who made the change.

Management

Microsoft sells direct to small businesses, making it very easy for them to purchase additional licenses and applications. Microsoft also includes admin tools for end-user administrators to self-manage their implementations. In addition, once an individual end user is set up with a Microsoft 365 account, that individual is given a terabyte of cloud storage and a great deal of autonomy in what files go up there and who has access to them.

In addition to the obvious security issues, the MSP has little visibility into, or control over, the environment.
THE NEED FOR MICROSOFT CLOUD ASSESSMENTS FOR MSPS

Most organizations with Microsoft 365 operate in some kind of hybrid environment with a combination of cloud and on-premises applications. While MSPs are generally on solid ground when it comes to the on-premises component, many need more visibility into and control over the virtual component of computing environments.

MSPs can scope new business more accurately when they have visibility into a prospect’s Microsoft Cloud environment. They can control the privacy and security of data for existing clients with a regular review of their Microsoft Cloud environment.

In addition to providing an independent assessment of the Microsoft Cloud, the MSP must also be able to tap into Microsoft’s own security scoring system to expose the areas of highest risk and vulnerability in order to help the MSP improve overall network security. The right Microsoft Cloud Assessment solution:

- Allows you to see what’s inside the key components of the Microsoft cloud infrastructure.
- Targets specific Microsoft 365 services that need “clean up” and better controls.
- Goes beyond Microsoft Control and Secure Score to identify risks based on IT best practices.
- Includes comparative security benchmarks (measured against similar-sized organizations) to help evaluate security posture.
- Saves technicians countless hours by automatically gathering all information about the Azure, Azure AD and Microsoft 365 environments, as opposed to manually drilling up and down to gather information.
- Allows you to create a New Cloud Security offering — like Security-as-a-Service using security reports.
- Shows improved cloud platform health over time.
- Enables you to sell faster — by enabling you to show your prospects why they need your services.
- Empowers you to differentiate yourself from the competition.
MANAGING THE MICROSOFT CLOUD WITH NETWORK DETECTIVE PRO

Quick, Easy and Comprehensive Scanning of the Microsoft Cloud Environment

Network Detective Pro is the first and only platform for gathering critical information about Azure, Azure AD and the Microsoft 365 cloud services – including SharePoint, OneDrive, Teams and Outlook Mail. It takes proven data-gathering and reporting technology and extends its reach into the Microsoft Cloud to provide MSPs and other IT professionals with critical visibility and control over Azure, Azure AD and Microsoft 365. The tool dives deep into the Azure AD environment and documents all organizations, domains and support services that are turned on for the AD environment. Every detail is presented in line-item fashion.

Key Features of Network Detective Pro's MS Cloud Assessment

- **Change Management**
  Documentation of all configuration changes including the previous setting and who changed it.

- **Easy Remote Data Collection**
  Can be run from any location with a simple login to the target account.

- **Quick Data Collection**
  Approximately 10 seconds per user for all data.

- **Flexible Reporting Options**
  Select one or more reports to automatically generate; all reports are editable and fully-brandable.
Risk Report

The Risk Report covers Azure, Azure AD and the key Microsoft 365 services. It includes an overall Risk Score, an overall Issues Score and a summary list of issues discovered. The issues come from the Microsoft controls and other best practices. This Risk Report identifies specific risks due to misconfigurations as well as risks created from turning on or off specific running components.

Management Plan

The Management Plan takes issues identified in the Risk Report, organizes them by severity and includes specific recommendations on how to remediate them. The report’s information is pulled directly from the Microsoft controls from multiple Microsoft 365 services, including SharePoint, OneDrive, Teams and Azure AD itself. It also identifies other types of issues related to misconfigurations and operations.

Azure AD Assessment

The Azure AD Assessment goes through the entire Azure Active Directory environment and documents all organizations, domains and support services that are turned on for the AD environment. Every detail is presented in a line-item fashion in an editable report document, including installed special applications, web URLs to those apps, organizational contacts, distribution lists, proxy addresses, Microsoft service plans and SKUs being used, groups, users, permissions, devices and more. The report is organized section-wise with a table of contents to help you locate the specific findings of interest. The problem areas are conveniently highlighted in red, making it easier to spot individual problems that need to be rectified.
**SharePoint Assessment**

The SharePoint Assessment is a detailed assessment that shows the total number of sites started under management, the number of active sites and the storage requirements, and also includes daily trends in the number of sites and storage usage. It then takes the site collections and breaks down all the individual sites for you to understand what is being published in each, how they are organized and what groups they contain. Among other things, the report helps you understand growth trends and better predict backup needs.

**OneDrive Usage Report**

The OneDrive Usage Report provides a high-level summary of all OneDrive usage. This is critical to know since it includes every user the system has as well as all the teams and all the sites created by the client. This overview report gives you a solid handle on how the OneDrive platform is growing. It also looks for spikes in growth that need to be managed and spikes in activity that may need to be investigated. The report provides trends over 30-, 60- and 90-day increments to give you a solid indicator of storage and bandwidth utilization.

**Outlook Mail Activity Report**

The Outlook Mail Activity Report is the perfect complement to the Network Detective Exchange Assessment, which provides comprehensive information about Microsoft 365 Exchange service usage. The Outlook Mail Activity Report provides a high-level summary of what emails are being sent and received by your top 10 active senders and active receivers for the reporting period. This report is meant to be run month-over-month to identify power users who may need more capacity as well as mailboxes that are not being read and likely represent recently inactive users that need to be cleaned up.
The Microsoft Teams Assessment provides details about each team in the system, including who the owners are, what channels they have and what kind of user identity audits have been conducted on the channels. There are individual entries that can be used for audits of the member settings, the guest settings, the message settings, the fun settings and the tab settings. This information goes beyond the Microsoft security score controls and includes other types of misconfigurations that might cause security problems, such as having guest members that are able to remove and delete channels.

The Microsoft Cloud Security Assessment report brings together all the security aspects of Microsoft Cloud under one umbrella. It not only includes your own Microsoft Control Score and Secure Score from Microsoft but also shows your trending score against the average score of your peers.

The Configuration Change Report is a very detailed technical report that identifies entity and configuration changes. The changes are grouped by properties, showing the old values versus the new values, and then grouped together into bands called “Change Sets”. This report gives you the ability to look at a group of changes together and see how all the properties have changed for that particular time period. This is useful for change management and for capturing and documenting unwanted changes should you need to roll back those changes in the user interface.
When to Include an Exchange Assessment With a Microsoft Cloud Assessment

Exchange Assessment: The perfect companion for Microsoft Cloud Assessment

The Network Detective Exchange Assessment is a useful tool for evaluating prospect and new client networks in order to help with their migration from on-premises to the cloud. It provides you with all the tools you need to perform quick, easy and comprehensive assessments for most Microsoft Exchange and Microsoft 365 environments, including Office 365, Exchange 2013, Exchange 2010, Exchange 2007 and Exchange 2003.

Running an Exchange Assessment allows you to generate these additional reports:

- Exchange Risk Report and Management Plan Reports
- Mailbox Detail Report for every user
- Distribution and Mailbox Permission Reports
- Traffic and Use Report
- Mobile Device Report
- And more

Brand them as your own and present them either as a stand-alone, one-time assessment, or as part of a regularly scheduled managed email service.
CONCLUSION

It's All About Making Money and Saving Time

By adding Network Detective Pro's Microsoft Cloud Assessment as part of your prospecting, you can:

- Effectively gain an advantage over your competitors.
- Close deals faster by identifying and highlighting risks to sell against.
- Provide faster, easier and more comprehensive onboarding.
- Undertake project work (user clean-up, group clean-up, site organization).
- Scope and sell cloud backup (e.g., Spanning).
- Run monthly as security service (remediate new risks, review change reports).

Network Detective Pro and all other RapidFire Tools products are available for purchase on the RapidFire Tools website. For a personal demonstration of these tools prior to purchase, click here!

Sources
2. Flexera 2020 State of the Cloud Report
3. Ibid
4. Based on McAfee analyzed cloud usage data from Skyhigh Cloud Access Security Broker (CASB) for over 27 million users

About RapidFire Tools

RapidFire Tools, Inc creates innovative business-building technology tools for Managed Service Providers (MSPs). More than 8,000 technology service professionals worldwide use products from RapidFire Tools to close more business, offer more services, keep more customers, and make more money. The company’s offerings include Network Detective®, a complete suite of IT assessment, documentation and reporting tools; Compliance Manager, the only Compliance Automation Tool for MSPs; and Cyber Hawk, a custom cybersecurity appliance that enables an MSP to offer insider cyber threat detection and alerting. To learn more, visit www.rapidfiretools.com or call 678-323-1300.