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More email for less money

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There is no recession if you're a certified and experienced Microsoft Exchange administrator. Headhunters tell me these techs are earning up to the \$100,000 in some parts of the country. So if you or your management have been avoiding hosted e-mail because those services cost money and the belief around your shop is e-mail is free, think again. Then take another look at hosted e-mail services in general, and hosted Exchange services in particular.

Derek Christensen, Information Systems Director for [Juice Harvest](#) ^[7], trusts his outsourced e-mail hosting provider, [Intermedia](#) ^[8], for the 100 or so e-mail boxes under his control. He switched a couple of years ago when he decided his in-house e-mail system didn't do enough. When he searched for an Exchange administration specialist, he decided to rethink the Exchange migration plan and signed up with Intermedia instead.

"We did a cost comparison with a three year projection and discovered it was more cost effective to use a hosted service," Christensen said. "That was especially true when we took into account that we'd have to hire another employee to fully implement Exchange."

That comment up top about thinking e-mail is free hits home with Christensen. "Our CFO knew much more about the costs in IT, but the president was surprised e-mail wasn't really free. That took some explaining."

Juice Harvest is a pretty big small business, with around 350 employees. Since plant floor employees don't use e-mail, the company only needs around 100 e-mail accounts. But those users need a full range of e-mail services.

"We're growing, and we need collaboration and shared calendars," said Christensen. "Over the last year and a half we started deploying Blackberry devices to managers. We need those mobile features for our e-mail to be fully functional."

Don't lump Juice Harvest into "the cloud is our life" group of Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) fans, because Intermedia's service is the only hosted application the company uses. "The core of our system is ERP, and our vendor doesn't offer a SaaS option," Christensen said. "We're just getting into a major sales push, so we may need a SaaS solution for our sales staff before long."

Pricing for Intermedia's services vary widely depending on how many features you opt for and the total number of users. A rule of thumb for most hosted Exchange providers is \$10-\$15 per user per month.

Jonathan McCormick, Chief Operating Office of Intermedia, claims his company is the leader in the marketplace in fully featured Exchange seats. "We have over 10 years of fine tuning and updating our management and monitoring tools to handle Exchange properly," he said. "We ignore Microsoft's management interface and wrote our own monitoring system and end user control panels."

McCormick came to Intermedia a couple of years ago. "I helped some friends start a small business, and they used QuickBooks online for \$19 for three users. That's when it really hit me how powerful the SaaS model was for small businesses."

Intermedia is one of many hosted Exchange service providers. If you search for "hosted Exchanges services" you'll get over 2 million results, including Microsoft's own offering.

But hosted e-mail options go way beyond Exchange. Google's Gmail is free for individuals and small groups, and Google's own hosted e-mail offering costs \$50 per user per year, a substantial discount over the \$10-\$15 per user per month for Exchange services. [Google Apps](#) [9], and many other non-Exchange systems, also offer shared calendars, contact lists, document storage, and more. Collaboration service providers like [HyperOffice](#) [10] and [InfoStreet](#) [11] offer e-mail services alone, or as part of a complete suite of collaborative workspace tools.

Intermedia just released two new products to support companies handling their own Exchange servers who can't switch to a hosted model because of current license costs or migration hassles. One is a hosted antivirus and antispam service to replace the extra software needed for Exchange. Called SpamStopper, the service handles viruses and phishing messages as well. The price is 50 cents per user per month after an upfront fee of \$50 for the first 50 users.

The second is a Business Continuity solution that acts as a hot spare for a company's own Exchange server. If your server goes down, you switch over to Intermedia's service running as a backup, and you not only have full e-mail service, but also the last 14 days of mail history, calendar appointments, contacts, and other common Exchange goodies. The starting price of \$5 per user per month is far lower than running your own hot backup

service for your e-mail server.

Even [GoDaddy](#) [12] now offers a hosted Exchange e-mail service along with Web hosting. The company is partnering with Microsoft, and prices start at \$6.99 per month for an individual and \$59.99 per month for five Outlook Mobile users.

I asked Juicy Harvest's Christensen what will happen when Microsoft approaches them to use its hosted Exchange service, which it now has on the market. "Unless Intermedia gives us some reason to change, we're happy. We'll tell Microsoft no."

Original Author:

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