Determining factors when making your email archive migration decision

When migrating archived email, two common approaches exist: manual or automated. The following are considerations to take into account when deciding whether to automate your email archive migration to Microsoft Office 365 using third party middleware tools.

Consideration	Manual	Automated
Compliance/ Chain of Custody	In most instances it is not possible to provide a complete audit trail of the export and import process. Further, when exporting the data manually to disk, personnel managing the process have access to the exported data which adds uncertainty when trying to maintain chain of custody.	By using a repeatable, automated and auditable process you can be certain that the migrated data will be legally defensible. Detailed reporting, to an individual message level, can be provided to demonstrate CoC from the source to the destination.
Infrastructure	Native export leverages the existing archive infrastructure, placing significant load on servers. In many cases, trying to do more than 1 or 2 archives concurrently can make archive servers unresponsive, creating the need for constant monitoring.	The migration middleware tools are lightweight and place minimal load on the existing archive infrastructure. If necessary, tools can be throttled to ensure there is no noticeable impact.
Storage	Additional disk space is required to store exported data. Typically 3 times the amount of the archive size is required as a result of removing compression and single instancing.	Requires minimal transactional storage to facilitate the migration.
Project Timelines	Export and import processes are usually not multithreaded, allowing only one mailbox to be processed concurrently. This can increase the overall migration timeline and is exacerbated when the process stops each time there is a failure, requiring the export to be manually restarted.	The time to migrate is significantly optimised as the multithreaded approach allows up to 100 mailboxes to be processed simultaneously. Bulk migrations can also be carried out non-stop and at any time. The limited impact on infrastructure means data migration can run 24x7.

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Troublesome Data

The native tools struggle to cope with corrupted and invalid data sets. Often the export or import process stops with no explanation when a corrupt message is encountered.

As a result of full check-point functionality, any messages that fail to migrate are logged for investigation and rectification at a later stage without stopping the data migration.

Resourcing

Resources are required to closely monitor manual extractions. When a task fails and the process stops, it can rarely be automatically restarted. Further, the next mailbox cannot commence unless the previous one has completed making manual monitoring a must.

Once the production migration has commenced in earnest, only daily check points are required to confirm everything is running as expected. The tools can also be configured to alert when an issue arises, eliminating the need for constant monitoring

Reporting

Typically, native export and import utilities do not have reporting capabilities. This is a risk for organisations requiring reporting to be provided such as 'number of messages successfully or unsuccessfully migrated'. Without adequate reporting, there is no guarantee that all source data has migrated to the target.

Detailed reporting is available at any time. Some of the key reports include migration status, errors, chain of custody, and age profile.

Shortcuts/Stubs

Shortcuts/stubs in user mailboxes will not work. Once the migration is complete, all legacy shortcuts will be 'orphaned' and need to be manually removed from mailboxes.

Shortcuts can be deleted, converted to the new archive platform format or recreated with little to no impact on the user. The migration tools synchronise user mailboxes to obtain an accurate location of the shortcut, ensuring it is placed in the correct (same) location at the target.

User Experience

A limited number of migration approaches are available impacting user experience as follows:
- Inability to easily access legacy archives
- Impact to daily mail flow due mailbox quota issues
- Legacy shortcuts not working

Seamless user experience.

Migrations can be done in the background without users' knowledge or impact.

PST Files	PST files have limitations on size and a breach of these limits will often cause problems when importing. Accordingly, some users need to be exported in multiple passes. Most archive platforms have a capability to export archived data using date filters. Doing so means more PST files per user that must be individually imported. Often PST's are not able to be consolidated requiring more import tasks to be managed.	PST files are not used as a transport mechanism, removing any risks associated with this process. Where PST's are required (some cloud archive platforms take data via PST) the migration toolsets can easily control the size of the PSTs to ensure there is no risk of corruption and can consolidate the output to fewer files.
Raw Message	When EML or MSG is selected as the method of transport, the folder structure of the archive will not be retained.	Automated migrations move data directly to the target platform eliminating the need for raw EML/MSG objects and any risks associated with this process.
Other	If archiving continues during the data extraction each archive will need to be exported twice, increasing total time and effort. If archiving is stopped, mail platforms need capacity for growth in mailbox size.	Migration can run continuously in the background until the organisation is ready to cut over to the target platform. Once users are cut over, the migration tools can run a final delta migration ensuring nothing was missed.

Success is highly unlikely for manual migrations of archived email data. Leveraging proven outcome-focused methodologies, automated archive migrations provide the confidence that all readable data has been migrated to the new platform in a legally defensible and controlled manner.

To find more information on Insentra's Data Migrations Services, contact Insentra on +61 2 8203 1600 or email info@insentra.com.au.

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