

Hosted Exchange Buyers Guide

20 Questions to Ask Your Prospective Hosted Exchange Provider

In addition to providing 24x7 access to Microsoft Exchange, your hosted Exchange provider should deliver email archiving; ensure continuity; encrypt emails; and protect you from spam, phishing, viruses and other malware. Make sure the solution encompasses mobile devices such as BlackBerries, cell phones and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs).

1. How many users do you support today? Service providers with only a handful of clients face an uncertain future.
2. What does your SLA provide? No one can provide a guaranteed 100% uptime so beware over-inflated promises or, conversely, providers with no written SLA.
3. How financially-sound is the hosted service provider? If a hosting company disappears, your Exchange implementation is at risk.
4. What do current customers say? Nobody knows a service better than existing clients, so make sure you get concrete answers to hard questions about reliability, access, customer service and any problems they've experienced.
5. Do you have Microsoft-certified technicians on-staff? Your Exchange host should employ Microsoft-certified staff to ensure technological prowess and support. One reason you're partnering with a service provider is to leverage their investment in highly qualified personnel.
6. Which in-house technologies do you use to support your hosted clients? If a service provider doesn't invest in its infrastructure, this does not bode well for the services it provides. Make sure providers use top-tier vendors & the latest technologies.
7. What other services do you provide? Finding a partner with multiple areas of expertise allows you to easily expand into other technology hosting agreements for money- and time-savers such as unified communications.
8. What migration tools are at my disposal? A provider's use of automated tools eliminates a lot of the necessary legwork, while live telephone support ensures you'll get answers when and how you need them.
9. How do you support after-hours email users? Some service companies only have a skeleton crew, if any, after-hours. Since employee's access email around the-clock, it's important that someone is always available to answer the phone if questions or problems arise. Therefore, 24x7 support is vital.
10. How do you support my end-users in different geographies or countries? You don't want agreements with multiple service providers; make certain your provider supports all the regions in which you operate - or look elsewhere.
11. Do you support mobile email users? With more and more people accessing email via their phones it's critical that your service provider supports these users.
12. Are you PCI Certified? Payment Card Industry data security standards - mandated in many states - encompass acquiring banks, Independent Sales Organizations (ISOs), processors, hosts, e-commerce and retail merchants, shopping carts and other merchant services providers. PCI is a

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set of requirements designed to ensure that companies that process, store or transmit credit card information retain a secure environment.

13. Do you offer Microsoft Exchange 2010 as a hosted service? If not, how will the service provider support you when you decide to upgrade?
14. What is your average on-hold time for callers? Obviously nobody wants to spend their time on-hold. If a company cannot quantify hold times, that should send up a warning flag.
15. How will you support me as I grow? As you expand operations, can your service provider support more employees, more geographies and more technologies?
16. How do I control my data if I use your service? Your data should belong to you, and this fact must be stated clearly in your agreement. Watch out for companies that may hold data hostage if their contract is not renewed.
17. Is any of the migration process automated? Automation eliminates many time-consuming but necessary tasks, reducing the chance of errors and speeding up your hosted Exchange implementation. These tools allow you to learn from the combined experiences of your service provider, rather than demanding you duplicate efforts.
18. How do you help me migrate my end-users? Some hosted Exchange businesses only offer a technical support manual. Look for a partner that provides telephone and online support, as well as automation tools for many processes.
19. How long does migration typically take? It's important that your migration can occur quickly so you can immediately reap the benefits of your hosted Exchange agreement. The more automation and live assistance available to you, the speedier the process will be.