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# Email retention and preservation

How to nail your strategy and  
migrate with confidence

Cloud Essentials e Book  
November 2023



**Welcome to the Cloud Essentials Email Retention and Preservation eBook. Inside, we explore the good, bad and ugly of modern email retention, the benefits of using Microsoft 365 to host all your legacy email, and the pitfalls you'll need to avoid when planning and executing a migration.**

## The Good

Microsoft 365 has come a long way in terms of email retention and preservation functionality. It's now able to handle the vast majority of retention use cases with a number of cost-effective options for handling legacy and/or leaver data.

This presents a compelling opportunity to maximise the value you get from your existing Microsoft licencing by offloading third-party email retention solutions, consolidating your data estate within Microsoft, and taking advantage of unified security and compliance controls.

## The Bad

Regardless of platform, handling email preservation incorrectly risks the authenticity of search results being called into question. That's the last thing you need when trying to win or defend a court case, uncover the truth behind an internal HR dispute, or untangle a multi-million-dollar business transaction gone wrong.

Email migrations, retention and preservation strategies, policies and systems all have to be rock solid and fully defensible – anything less is worthless.

## The Ugly

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it" is a popular approach to email preservation. The ugly truth, however, is that this isn't a sustainable solution in today's environment.

Not only are growing data volumes sending storage costs skyrocketing, but growing privacy and compliance regulations have created a complex risk tapestry that takes careful – and intentional – handling to navigate successfully.



## The Jargon

Before we dive into the good stuff, let's quickly address the issue of jargon.

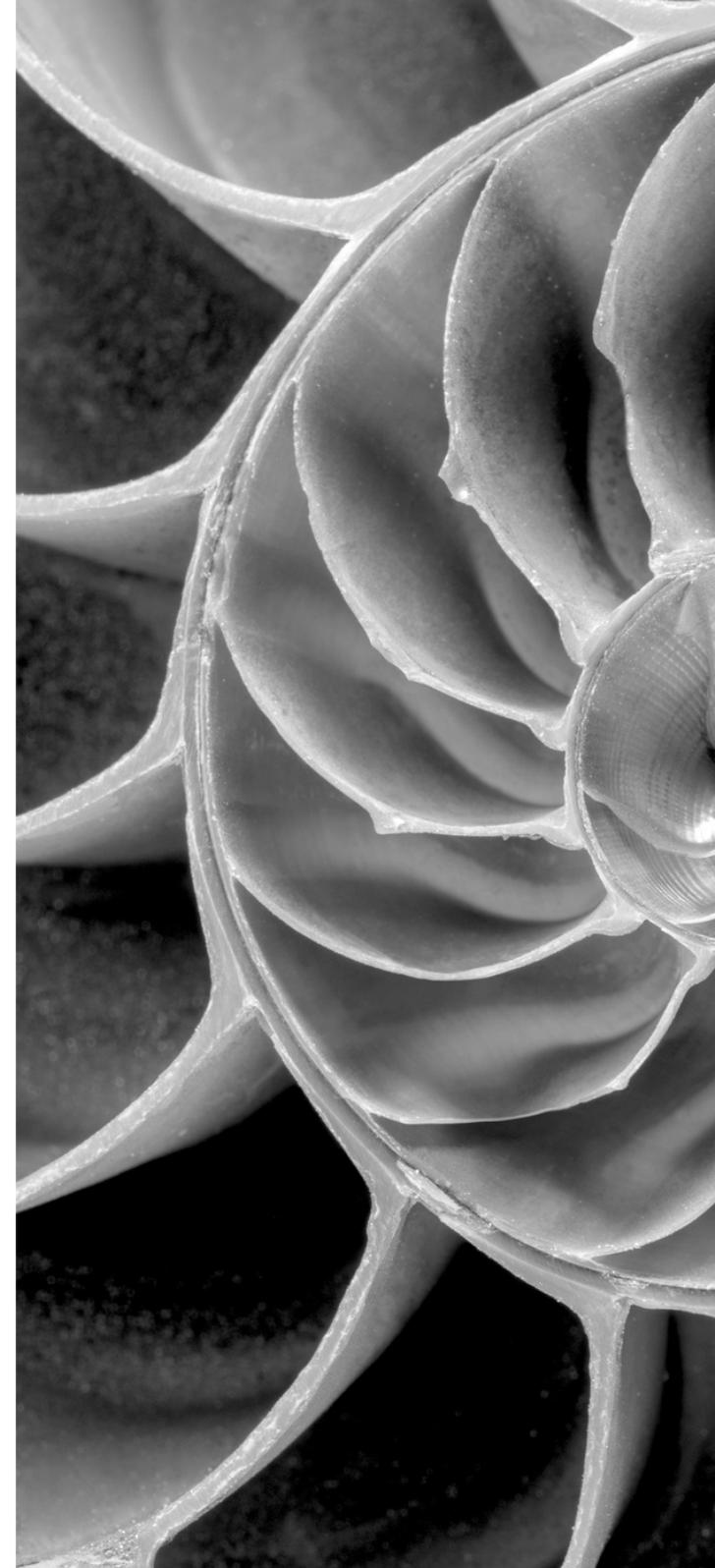
Retention and preservation are often used interchangeably, but there are some subtle differences that it's important to be aware of.

Strictly speaking, retention refers to storing data (in this case, email) for a finite period in order to comply with specific operational and regulatory requirements. Retention goes hand-in-hand with disposition, ensuring data is kept only as long as it's useful (and legally permitted).

Preservation, on the other hand, is traditionally for legal purposes. It refers to the storage of potential evidence with an emphasis on chain-of-custody and immutable preservation. Preservation policies typically trump retention policies to avoid accidental disposition of relevant data that has reached the end of its ordinary retention period.

Despite their differing purposes, the migration and deployment considerations for email retention and preservation are generally very similar. This is particularly true in Microsoft 365 where retention, disposition and preservation of all data types is handled using the same tool suite: Microsoft Purview.

As such, this eBook focusses less on the nitty gritty differences between email retention and email preservation, and more on the shared considerations to set your organisation up for success with both.





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# Key considerations for email retention and preservation

While every email retention and preservation strategy will differ, the following considerations are universal.

## Long term storage

Secure long-term storage is the cornerstone of both retention and preservation. In both cases, email records need to be maintained in an unalterable manner and protected against unauthorised access for as long as necessary.

Remember: security may be a primary concern for long term storage, but with email traffic volumes growing exponentially, cost can be equally important. Working across multiple interfaces and disjointed repositories (like Office 365, on-premises Exchange servers and journal mailboxes, third-party email archives, PST files, hosted email services etc.) can add significantly to both cost and risk.

**Pro tip:** Most organisations find that consolidating long-term email storage in Microsoft 365 reduces risk and storage overheads and significantly improves data governance capabilities.



## Microsoft 365's unique approach to email storage

Instead of moving email records into specific storage locations, Microsoft uses in-place storage to achieve a similar effect to conventional archiving and journaling without additional storage costs or admin.

### *Archiving*

Archived emails are stored in a secure Archive folder located within the user's mailbox. Archiving can be done on an organisational or user level, helping to maximise active mailbox storage space while keeping archived emails secure, searchable and subject the same retention/preservation policies as always.

**All Microsoft Exchange mailboxes include an additional 50GB of Archive storage.**

### *Journaling*

Unlike conventional journals, Microsoft 365 does not intercept emails in transit in order to take a journal copy which is then sent to a standalone journal store. Rather, it retains an immutable copy of any email subject to a retention policy (or all emails to/from a mailbox on litigation hold) at individual mailbox level.

Should a user delete an email under retention, the email is removed from their inbox, but retained in a hidden folder within the Recoverable Items Folder where it remains protected and available for eDiscovery.

**All Microsoft Exchange mailboxes include an additional 100GB of Recoverable Items storage.**



## Cloud Essential's Content Preserve solution for legacy email archives

Migrating legacy email archives into an effective new home in Microsoft isn't always straightforward given Microsoft's unconventional in-place archiving approach. Working with large data volumes, proprietary formats or stringent operational/regulatory requirements only makes things trickier.

That said, the business case for migrating on-premises and third-party email archives into Microsoft is a compelling one. It typically offers significant cost efficiencies, improves agility, and unlocks invaluable flexibility, capability, and peace of mind.

To help organisations capitalise on these opportunities, we created our Cloud Essentials Content Preserve.

Content Preserve uses cost-effective Azure BLOB storage to create a secure, cloud-based repository that is custom-fit to your content volumes, retention requirements and eDiscovery needs.

[Find out more](#)

The platform is flexible and scalable, and enables you to leverage all your existing Microsoft security, governance and eDiscovery capabilities for a lower cost, higher value archive experience.

Our Content Preserve solution also includes:

- **Detailed pre-migration investigation** into your content estate, regulatory demands, operational requirements and retention approach.
- **De-duplication and defensible deletion** of ROT to minimise data volumes where possible
- **Specialist advice** on content optimisation and management techniques
- Our **fine-tuned preservation solution** leveraging your existing Microsoft investment
- **Expert content migration** from legacy archives with a focus on governance and security
- **Access to eDiscovery experts** via our sister company, [Salient Discovery](#).



## Data integrity

Preserved email records must be maintained in a way that ensures the data remains unchanged and authentic. The slightest chance of spoliation could destroy any value the data once held

At rest, data integrity is fairly straightforward if you've done your long-term storage homework. If your email retention strategy requires migration to achieve a lower cost long-term solution, however, data integrity becomes a more complex project.

Defensible migrations with full chain of custody are specialised affairs, and greatly benefit from the experience of a skilled migration partner. A comprehensive plan of action is critical, and should include the handling of all compliance and/or legal requirements as well as complexities like leaver data, deleted data, data on litigation hold, legacy PST files and more.



## Migration Snapshot

**Client:** Government Financial Institution

**Compliance requirements:** Extremely High

**Project:** Mimecast to Microsoft 365 migration

**Users:** 3000

Cloud Essentials successfully migrated our client's Mimecast email archive into Microsoft 365, achieving a significant reduction in their long-term costs while preserving full data integrity. Our deployment ensured easy access to the preserved data for eDiscovery and search (required for compliance/regulatory purposes). The client took over management and maintenance post-migration and was thrilled with its simplicity. We received zero support calls in the first year!

## Legal and Compliance Requirements (Data Lifecycle Management)

Legal mandates and industry regulations often require specific email records to be preserved for specific durations. It can take some careful crafting of retention policies to achieve the desired results. Doing so typically requires cross-business stakeholder collaboration to define the requirements and agree on effective controls.

Things to consider include:

- **Time-Based Rules:** How long should a specific email be retained/preserved? How does content/context influence this retention period?
- **Deletion vs Archiving:** At the end of their retention period, which emails should be deleted from the active email system, and which (if any) should be moved to an email archive.
- **Storage efficiency:** Are there certain unnecessary emails that can safely be removed from the active system to optimise storage resource use?
- **Compliance and Risk Mitigation:** What disposition policies should be used to ensure that email records are never held longer than necessary to avoid violating regulations or creating an unnecessarily large attack surface.

**Pro tip:** Creating effective policies is only half the challenge. You'll also need to translate them into real-world configurations. Without an in-depth understanding of how Microsoft executes on policies, there is a very real risk of unintended consequences that an experienced partner can help you avoid.

## Microsoft Purview Data Lifecycle Management

Microsoft Purview Data Lifecycle Management is where you'll put your retention and disposition policies into action. Your policy configurations here can be applied across all Microsoft 365 workloads, including Exchange, SharePoint, OneDrive, Microsoft 365 Groups, Teams, Viva Engage and Skype for Business.

This is also where you'll find Microsoft's default Mailbox archiving policies (which can be customised to suit your requirements) and [adaptive policy scopes](#) to manage the handling of inactive mailboxes.



## Search and Retrieval

There's no point in retaining or preserving email records if you have no way to search for what you need, when you need it. That makes eDiscovery capabilities an important element of any email retention/preservation strategy.

### Microsoft Purview eDiscovery (Standard/Premium)

Microsoft's eDiscovery capabilities have come a long way in recent years, offering powerful search, discovery, retrieval and display functionality.

Together, these make it possible for organisations to perform their own in-house eDiscovery, apply their own legal holds, and build their own cases.

Microsoft Purview eDiscovery is such a gamechanger that it has motivated many organisations to bring as much content as possible (including email) into Microsoft. However, where migration is not a viable option, there are data connectors that make it possible to extend Purview eDiscovery's capabilities to certain third-party workloads.



## Conclusion

Using Microsoft 365 for email retention and preservation presents a huge number of opportunities to reduce spend and compliance risk, and increase user productivity and security.

Add to this Microsoft Purview's additional features, like Insider Risk Management and Communication Compliance, and the business case for email migration becomes even more compelling.

Of course, none of that makes the migration itself any less daunting – particularly when you have stringent legal/compliance requirements for the transition. Bringing a skilled migration partner on board is a great way to mitigate the risks of getting it wrong, while improving your ability to maximise your migration – and Microsoft – ROI.

## About Cloud Essentials

We're masters of migration; overcoming the complex and delivering the difficult is what we do every day. We'll deliver a hassle-free experience that keeps you focused on your goals.

[Find out more](#)





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