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GAME CHANGING STRATEGIES FOR MOVING PST FILES TO THE CLOUD

GAME CHANGING STRATEGIES FOR MIGRATING PERSONAL STORAGE TABLES

Moving PSTs to the Cloud Compliantly

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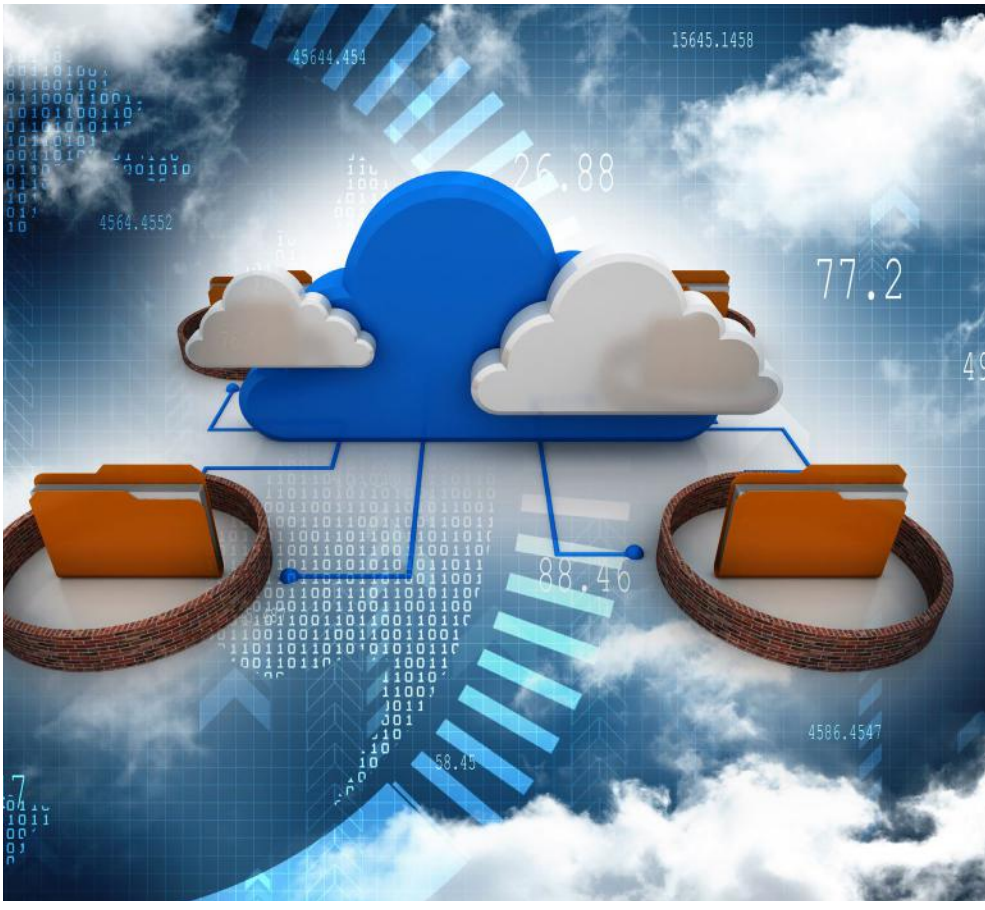
Many years ago, PST (Personal Storage Table) files were introduced as a feature that could help Exchange Server administrators to conserve storage space on mail servers. Outlook could be configured to download messages from a server, and place the messages into a PST file that resided on the user's own computer. This process removed the message from the user's Exchange Server mailbox, thereby reducing the Exchange Server's storage consumption. In retrospect, however, PST files have created more problems than they have solved.

The main problem with the use of PST files, is that the files decentralize mailbox data. Suppose, for instance, that a user configures a laptop to download all Exchange Server data to a PST file. In this type of situation, the user's mailbox data may never be backed up. If the user's laptop were to be lost or stolen, significant data loss could occur.

Another problem with PST file use is that it may undermine the user's ability to access their messages from anywhere. If a user's mail is locked away in a PST file, then only devices that have access to the PST file will be able to access the full contents of a user's mailbox. If a user were to connect to their Exchange Server mailbox from a device that does not have access to the PST file, then the user would only be able to access those mailbox items that have not yet been downloaded to the PST file.



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Because of these and other problems, many organizations have made a concerted effort to locate any existing PST files, and import the contents of those PST files into the Exchange Server archives. In fact, numerous tools are available that can help administrators with PST file discovery and migration. Even so, many such tools perform only basic PST file discovery and migration, rather than working to address the underlying business requirements that drive the migration.

Although simplistic PST migrations were once an acceptable practice, changing business requirements have rendered such migrations obsolete. For example, it was once safe to assume that PST file contents would

be migrated into the Exchange Server information store. Today however, PST contents commonly need to be migrated to Office 365 instead. Legacy migration tools might not allow for such migrations. Similarly, legacy migration tools may potentially lack support for Exchange archive mailboxes.

Another common PST migration problem is that PST migrations can be very resource intensive. If left unchecked, PST migrations can consume so much storage I/O on the destination server, that users experience very noticeable performance degradation. This is especially true of situations in which multiple PST files are being simultaneously migrated.

Of course, storage I/O is not the only hardware resource that is consumed during a PST file migration. The migration process can be disruptive to other workloads if too much network bandwidth is consumed. Network bandwidth consumption tends to be of relatively minor concern for migrations that occur on premises. However, PST migrations have the potential to severely impact already congested Internet links when organizations migrate PST contents to the Office 365 cloud.

The resource consumption problem can be compounded by the migration of duplicate PST files. It is relatively common for users to have redundant copies of PST files, and attempting to blindly migrate such files unnecessarily increases the migration process' overhead.

Although many of the problems related to PST migrations stem from limitations that are built into legacy migration tools, or from the performance impact that is caused by the migration process, there are also some business specific considerations that must be taken into account.

One such consideration is the continued need for PST files. Outlook is not configured to use PST files by default, so if a user is making use of PST files then there may be a good reason why PST files are being used. Some organizations, for example, use PST files as a mechanism for controlling the cost of employee turnover. If an employee leaves the company, that employee's mailbox contents may be exported to a PST file, and provided to the former employee's replacement. Although Exchange Server and Office 365 both support providing a new employee with access to the former employee's mailbox, doing so can cost more than using PST files due to per user licensing fees.

Ideally, a PST migration tool should allow an administrator to selectively migrate PST files (with an option to leave certain PST files in place). If PST files are allowed to remain in place, however, it is important that the organization not lose oversight of these PST files. There needs to be a way to manage these files in place, without the management operations being disruptive to the end user.

IDEALLY, A PST MIGRATION TOOL SHOULD ALLOW AN ADMINISTRATOR TO SELECTIVELY MIGRATE PST FILES (WITH AN OPTION TO LEAVE CERTAIN PST FILES IN PLACE).

Another problem with blindly importing PST file contents is that not everything that exists in PST files should be imported. As you are no doubt aware, most organizations apply message retention policies to their mail servers. It is tempting to think of these policies as mechanisms for ensuring that messages are kept for the amount of time required by law. However, such policies can also act as a mechanism for purging messages that have exceeded their required retention period.

It is usually in an organization's best interest to remove messages that are no longer required to be retained. Doing so not only helps to decrease storage costs, but may also shield the organization from certain types of legal exposure. If litigation were to be brought against an organization, then any existing messages could potentially be subpoenaed. Messages do not become exempt from legal discovery simply because they have aged beyond the required retention period.

With this in mind, it becomes easy to see why it is important to have granular control over the PST migration process. Messages that fall within the required retention range should be migrated, and all others should be purged unless there is a compelling reason to keep such messages. Given the fact that a mass PST migration may involve thousands of PST files, the only way to effectively control the message import process is to use policy based controls that automatically determine which messages to migrate.

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TransVault PSTInsight Provides In-depth Analytics into PST Files

TransVault PSTInsight is different from other vendors' PST migration products in that the product was designed to work with PST files at a content level, with a focus on data analysis, as opposed to working with the PST file as an entity . Over time TransVault PSTInsight has evolved into a PST migration tool, but continues to benefit from its roots as an analytical tool. By leveraging the tool's deep analytic capabilities in an effort to gain deep insight into PST file contents, administrators are able to migrate PST files with confidence.

Unlike tools such as Microsoft's native PST Capture tool (https://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/hh781035(v=exchg.141).aspx), TransVault PSTInsight helps administrators to understand the data that exists within PST files across the organization, and allows PST contents to be migrated in a way that makes sense for the organization based on the organization's own unique needs.

TransVault PSTInsight's primary advantage over competing solutions is that it provides an unprecedented degree of flexibility. Whereas many PST migration utilities allow PST files to be migrated to Exchange Server, TransVault PSTInsight allows PST contents to be migrated to any E-mail archive, regardless of whether the archive exists on premises or in the cloud as a part of a hosted solution.

TransVault PSTInsight is also unique in that it supports decentralized management. Although most organizations probably begin a PST migration project with the goal of phasing out PST file use, there may be special situations in which there is a legitimate business need for a few PST files to remain. In these types of situations, PSTInsight is able to manage the PST contents in place, without migrating the PST file to an alternate location and without being disruptive to the end user. The advantage to doing so is that it becomes possible to perform Early Case Assessment and other types of analysis on the data, even though the PST data has not been migrated to a centralized location.

TransVault PSTInsight is designed to support extremely large scale migrations, involving thousands of PST files. Regardless of the size or scope of a migration however, an administrator can use the software's interface to limit the volume of data that must be migrated, thereby reducing the time, cost, and complexity of the migration operation. An administrator might for instance, avoid migrating any duplicate data and any data that is more than five years old.

TransVault PSTInsight was designed to allow PST migration operations to adhere to an organization's message retention policies. Items that fall outside of an organization's retention period may be deleted rather than being migrated. If there are PST files that need to be managed in place, then policies can be applied to those PST files as well, ensuring that content whose age exceeds the established retention period can be automatically purged, even though the PST file has not been migrated.

Administrators using TransVault PSTInsight to manage and migrate PST files can use the software's built-in dashboard to monitor the migration process. This dashboard has been designed to provide complete oversight of the migration process, and to give administrators confidence that the migration process is being completed as planned.

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