

Google Gmail Support for Outlook Challenges Exchange

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Taking its campaign to capture enterprise e-mail seats to a new level, Google released client-side code which allows Outlook to work natively against the Gmail back end.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 9 June 2009, Google released Google Apps Sync for Microsoft Outlook, a client plug-in that allows Outlook e-mail, calendar and contacts to work with Gmail in a manner similar to the way Outlook works with Microsoft Exchange Server.

Analysis

After two years, uptake of Google Apps Premier Edition in the commercial sector still lags, with about 500,000 paid seats of Gmail in daily use. One barrier to Gmail adoption has been users' devotion to the Microsoft Outlook e-mail and calendar client. Most users wholly identify their e-mail experience with Outlook and don't even know they are running the Exchange server on the back end. Users and IT management want to maintain Outlook as the e-mail client for its familiarity and functions. Outlook does work against Gmail, but via the IMAP protocol, which does not support a variety of functions, including calendar.

Many other vendors (for example, IBM, Oracle, Novell and Sun) have recognized that native Outlook support offers the best chance for competing against Exchange. All the vendors have had mixed results in that effort largely because they never perfected Outlook support. Certain functions always dropped out, such as calendar delegation or changing a recurring meeting. As a result, users lacked confidence in the Outlook connector. We expect that Cisco will also support Outlook when it enters the e-mail software-as-a-service (SaaS) market later in 2009, but it will eschew the client plug-in in favor of server-side translation, which it believes will yield a richer Outlook experience and be easier to manage.

Google positions its client plug-in as a tool to help companies transition from Exchange to Gmail rather than as a permanent combination with Exchange. We expect that Sync for Microsoft Outlook will have incomplete functions and that users will resist moving from Outlook to the Gmail client, thereby pressuring Google to fill in the functional gaps. Google's Outlook support, along with many other Gmail improvements (such as LDAP support, offline client and BlackBerry support), underscore the aggressive and long-term campaign Google is waging to establish itself as a leading supplier of commercial e-mail services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Exchange shops considering a transition to Gmail should:

- Stress-test Google Apps Sync for Microsoft Outlook, and then establish a widespread pilot, before they commit to Gmail.
- Not consider functional gaps to be a show-stopper, but use them as one factor in a thoughtful go/no-go decision.
- Consider both client and server functions in any decision-making process.

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Exchange Market Vulnerability Starts With Outlook" — Supporting Outlook would allow Microsoft Exchange competitors to turn the discussion to price. **By Matt Cain**
- "Vendor Focus: Google's GAPE Is Improving but Still Not Ready for High Growth" — Google still lags behind its key competitors in responding to enterprise-specific

requirements, but Google will continue to close the product gap. **By Tom Austin and others**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

This research is part of a set of related research pieces. See "Roundup of E-Mail Research Through 3Q09" for an overview.

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