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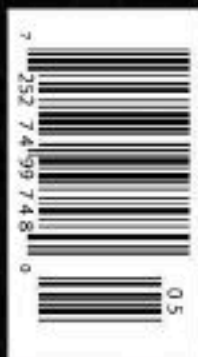
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EXCHANGE AND THE MAC

For some Mac users, the name "Microsoft" is synonymous with "avoid at any cost." But, believe it or not, Microsoft Exchange Server, when used with Microsoft Outlook for Mac or Entourage, is an excellent platform that can make happy, productive, and effective Mac business users—even in an all-Mac office. In this article, I'll go over some of the advantages for using Macs with Exchange in a business environment.

What Is Exchange?

First off, a quick overview. What is Microsoft Exchange? Simply put, it's server software that was introduced 15 years ago, and provides synchronized and shareable mail, calendar, contacts, tasks and notes to the users of its client software. It's been widely used for many years in enterprise environments with Windows workstations; the desktop client is Outlook for Windows. Exchange is also compatible with BlackBerry, which has also been a mainstay of the corporate world. Typically, companies host their own Exchange servers, but an appealing solution for small businesses is to use a hosted Exchange provider, which avoids the cost and administration of a server. There are several to choose from; Intermedia is among the best-known, while Microsoft Online Services is the cheapest.

Compatibility

Most Exchange server software in use today exists in 3 versions: 2003, 2007, and 2010. While all versions are compatible with Outlook for Windows as well as through webmail (known as Outlook Web Access), for the Mac, the story is more complex. This chart presents an overview of which versions of Exchange are compatible with which Mac clients.

Exchange and Mac Compatibility Chart

	Exchange 2003	Exchange 2007	Exchange 2010
Entourage 2004	x	x	
Entourage 2008	x	x	
Entourage 2008 (Web Services Edition)		x	x
Outlook 2011	x	x	
Apple Mail/iCal /Address Book in Snow Leopard		x	x
IMAP/POP/SMTP	x	x	x
Outlook Web Access	x	x	x

The Exchange-Outlook for Mac Combo

The best way to access an Exchange server from the Mac is to pair it with Outlook 2011. What can the Exchange-Outlook for Mac combo do that Apple Mail/iCal/Address Book with Mac OS X Server can't, and that Google Apps can't? It's simply the most robust synchronization platform available, one that's been in use for 15 years and is deeply trusted by the financial and legal sectors. As an example, one of our clients wanted to move from POP mail to a synchronized solution, and he had over two thousand deeply nested e-mail folders. No combina-

tion of Apple Mail, IMAP, or Google Mail could cope with it. Then we set him up with Exchange 2010 and Outlook 2011, and it just simply worked.

In addition, Outlook for Mac (and Entourage) paired with Exchange gives users the following benefits:

- Any item can belong to any number of categories, which you can then use to filter or sort (this is enormously valuable for contacts)
- There is a single-window integrated interface which some users prefer
- Designated users can have customized access to others' mail, calendar, and/or contacts
- Outlook has vastly more powerful search capabilities than anything in Apple's products

For administrators, there are benefits too:


- Setup of e-mail accounts can be extremely quick and simple
- Remote locking and wiping of mobile devices provides important security
- Outlook's ability to switch between multiple user profiles is a valuable troubleshooting tool

Outlook for Mac versus Entourage

For those familiar with Entourage, Outlook 2011 (for Intel-based Macs only) is better in a few important ways. Outlook draws several interface cues from Apple's products, particularly iCal, in its category filtering and overlaid calendars. In addition, Entourage's notoriously fragile monolithic file database has been replaced by a loose-file database, meaning it is Time Machine friendly and, if necessary, can be reliably rebuilt from scratch. And, for those familiar with Outlook for Windows, you should be prepared for some nice things in Outlook 2011, but some notable limitations as well.

Exchange and Mobile Devices

Exchange Server includes Exchange ActiveSync, which can wirelessly synchronize mail, calendar and contacts with many different mobile devices. Support is natively built into iOS (and, of course, Windows Mobile, for the three or four people who still use it). Most Android phones have some support, though it varies by model and manufacturer. BlackBerry users have extremely robust sync when they connect with BlackBerry Exchange Server, which is an option at hosted Exchange providers, or which is available in free and paid versions for use with your own Exchange server.

Using Exchange Server with Macs may seem counter-intuitive to the tried and true Mac user, but if you're interested in best solutions, you owe it a look before you make a decision for your business. (It'll only hurt a little.) In a future article we'll go through the steps of how to actually set up and use Exchange with Mac OS X and iOS. 



Ivan Drucker is the founder of IvanExpert, which provides Mac IT support to small businesses in New York City. He worked as an engineer for Apple at its headquarters in Cupertino, California, and has also served as development manager for the website of Sotheby's auction house.



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