

# A Case Study into Hosted Exchange, Provisioning and Control Panels

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The Hosted Exchange market is rapidly expanding. Large hosting companies already have well establish Exchange systems, but now, more than ever, smaller companies are looking to get into this market. Up until recently the Exchange market has been closed to small to medium hosting companies due to the high cost of provisioning and control panels. A number of solutions are now available to those wanting to offer high quality collaborative messaging without the large scale investment previously required. This case study intends to look at each of these solutions and evaluate both their good and bad points.

This guide is by no means exhaustive; these are the systems we have been able to evaluate. If you know of another system that would fit well into this guide, please let us know.

Thank you for reading!

The WindowsServ Team

## **Hsphere.**

[www.psoft.net](http://www.psoft.net)

**Minimum Number of servers required:** 3

**Software Cost:** \$4.50 per account + Server software costs

**Other software required:** 1 Linux (LAMP) server, 2 Windows Server 2003, 1 MS Exchange

Hsphere has been a popular hosting control panel for a number of years now. The latest version offers the ability to interact with your exchange server. Although it only offers basic interaction. It allows users to add domains, create mailboxes and edit MX records.

### **Pros:**

The big plus with the system is the small overhead, only 3 servers, allowing even the smallest company to offer exchange hosting. Hsphere also allows you to integrate Exchange with the rest of your hosting services, using the same control panel. Cost is worked out per account, so you only pay for as many accounts as you need.

### **Cons:**

The Exchange interface does not offer the advanced features of other control panels, allowing only domain and mailbox creation. It does not offer the same redundancy as other solutions as you are limited to 1 Exchange Server. Does not include SharePoint or Live Communications Server hosting.

## **Microsoft solution for hosted messaging .**

<http://www.microsoft.com/serviceproviders/solutions/hostedmessaging.mspx>

**Minimum Number of servers required:** 9

**Software cost:** Hosting solution software is offered Free + Server software costs

**Other software required:** All servers running 2003 server, at least 2 copies of exchange, MS SQL, MS ISA server (optional), SharePoint (optional) Live Communications Server (optional)

Microsoft has packaged all their hosting related systems under one heading, to allow companies to offer Exchange, SharePoint and Live Communications Server as one package. This solution is aimed squarely at the large companies with the capital to invest in a complicated infrastructure. The optimal MS configuration has a cluster of back-end exchange servers and SQL servers, and can reach anywhere between 16 and 20 servers. For this investment, you get a highly redundant system able to cope with a very large demand. The control panel system developed by MS offers varying levels of administration, from admin to user level.

### **Pros:**

Highly redundant systems ensure mailboxes are always available. Large capacity. Integrates 3 technologies in one hosting solution allowing a wide range of packages to be offered to customers.

### **Cons:**

High cost, complicated setup, takes a lot of time to research and develop the solution, requires a team of engineers to monitor and troubleshoot.

## **Microsoft solution for hosted messaging (cut down).**

<http://www.microsoft.com/serviceproviders/solutions/hostedmessaging.mspx>

**Minimum number of servers required:** 5

**Software cost:** Hosting solution software is offered Free + Server software costs

**Other software required:** All servers running server 2003, 2 x Exchange, MS SQL, ISA Server (optional), SharePoint (optional), Live Communication Server (optional)

While the full version of this product is aimed at large companies already in the market, this cut down version allows smaller companies to offer their own solution, with less initial investment. Utilising 5 servers (6 if you use ISA Server) this does not have the same redundancy and capacity as the full solution, being limited to 1000 users, but offers the same control panel and infrastructure for a significant cost reduction. Planning and deployment time is also reduced significantly, while still allowing hosts to offer all 3 MS hosting technologies.

### **Pros:**

Costs significantly less than the full solution while still offering the same services. Less planning and deployment time, allowing you to be up and running as soon as possible. Requires much less management and admin time. Upgrade to the full version possible at a later date.

### **Cons:**

Does not offer the same redundancy as the full solution, with only 1 back-end and 1 front-end Exchange server. Capacity is limited to 1000 users.

## **Easy Exchange Administrator**

<http://system-hosting.com/en/index.php>

**Number of servers required:** 1

**Software Cost:** €1999 ( approx \$2500) + Server software costs

**Other software required:** Server 2003, Exchange, MYSQL

This is a relatively new piece of software that claims to be able to handle all the administrative requirements of hosted exchange, including user control panel, whilst only requiring 1 server. This would allow hosting companies to offer hosted exchange for a minimal investment in hardware, 1 server minimum (although two domain controllers would improve redundancy), whilst still offering a wide range of options to the users, including an admin, reseller, user hierarchy

### **Pros:**

You can offer hosted exchange with as little as 1 server, while still offering a fully featured system. A SharePoint module is also available at additional cost.

### **Cons:**

No redundancy, licence is for only 1 exchange server so capacity limited by specification of hardware. Original product in German so may be some translation issues.

## **Hosted Express**

<http://www.msnetsoft.com/>

**Number of servers required:** 1

**Software Cost:** €200 - € 3000 Depending on amount of Organizations (approx \$270 - \$4000)

**Other software required:** Server 2003, Exchange 2003.

Again, another new entry into the market, aimed at those wanting to offer hosted exchange with relatively little investment. This again can be run on 1 server, although we would recommend an extra domain controller for redundancy. It has a tiered hierarchy to allow for administration, resellers and users to only get access to what they need, whilst providing an easy method to do so. Whilst it can be run all on one server, there is also the option of installing the web interface on a separate server, to allow for some load balancing.

### **Pros:**

Allows hosted Exchange Services with minimal initial investment. Provides all the services users need without additional complications. Ability to install web front end on separate server.

### **Cons:**

Limited redundancy. Does not allow for the use of frontend – backend configuration. If you want to use more servers, you will need another copy of the software for each server.

## **Manual solution.**

**Number of servers required:** 1-2

**Software Cost:** none + Server software costs

**Other software required:** all servers running server 2003, Exchange, MYSQL

It is possible to offer Hosted Exchange with no control panel at all, however it does require the administrator to create all new domains, users, mailboxes, even extra email addresses. This is a time consuming and inefficient task and is only really suited to small companies with a few users.

### **Pros:**

Inexpensive, requires minimal investment in software and infrastructure

### **Cons:**

Very time consuming, users have to wait for administrators to make any changes they require, requires dedicated administrators which may outweigh the cost of a control panel.

## **Custom coded solution.**

A number of large Exchange hosts have their control panel custom coded to their needs. While this can be an expensive and time consuming operation, they will get a control panel that will do exactly what they want.

### **Pros:**

Control panel designed to their requirements and infrastructure.

### **Cons:**

Expensive, can take time to develop, needs in-house or developers support.

## **Other Solutions:**

There are some other solutions available here that we have not reviewed, either because they do not match the needs of most of our clients, or it was not feasible to review them. These include.

SWSOFT PEM - <http://www.swsoft.com/en/products/pem/scenarios/exchange/offer/>

If you would like any further information on any of these solutions, or would like to discuss how it can be implemented in your company please get in touch.

WindowsServ is staffed by MCSE and MCSA: Messaging Specialists. We have over 6 years experience with Microsoft Exchange, from 5.5 to 2003 and onwards to our current beta test of Exchange 2007.

We also have a wide range of administration solutions for all Windows Server Systems.

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