



Defence department makes quick turn to remote work

Governmental agencies can be seen as slow to adopt new processes, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, this foreign defence department needed to make a quick shift to remote working for both civilian and non-civilian employees while maintaining a high level of readiness. They urgently rolled out Microsoft 365 to enable remote work and communication for approximately 60,000 of their 140,000 users. However, they quickly discovered that while the implementation made remote work possible, it also hindered staff efficiency and output.

This expedited rollout did not allow for the time needed to fully implement comprehensive security and compliance controls, which in turn, severely limited the types of information staff could be allowed to access, store and use within their Microsoft 365 environment.

Leaders realised that, to eventually move forward into a post pandemic world, they would have to adopt new ways to work and support the predicted changes of a world defined by the “new normal.” That realisation led them to seek out and define new capabilities, such as empowering remote workers, while also deploying the necessary tools and services to support a new Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy for employees.

Short on both time and expertise, the department engaged Protiviti to help leverage the Microsoft 365 E5 product suite to ensure they meet the organisation’s information compliance requirements.

Tight security needs and lack of standardisation limited remote work

This complex organisation is made up of more than 20 different segments, each with its own level of autonomy and individual business needs. While the speedy rollout of Microsoft 365 enabled its staff to work remotely, the department lacked a unified approach to managing information and applying security measures across all its segments, and thus restricted widescale and deep adoption of Microsoft 365 tools such as SharePoint Online and the use of Teams in Microsoft Teams.

Many staff members were still using legacy systems and were not able to access their information without using a device on the organisation’s network. Those with access to Microsoft Teams were not using it to manage and collaborate on official documents. Staff members using Microsoft 365 did not have access to the bulk of the information required for their jobs — including records of decision, sources of truth, formal copies of official documents and more. Security protocols allowed only transitory information to be stored within the environment, hindering employees’ ability to work from a remote device or their personal devices.

In a post-pandemic landscape, empowering staff to be able to use secure and modern tools, including their personal equipment or mobile devices to access information and

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participate in meetings, would be critical to the department's ability to continue their essential work to support the nation's citizens.

Leveraging Microsoft to meet high demands for security and standardisation

The department knew it wanted to leverage Microsoft 365 tools such as SharePoint and Teams as their formal information repository, which would act as a source of truth and house the bulk of their information. This way, they would be able to apply information management protocols and have oversight of proper use and disposal of all data inside the environment. To achieve this, they needed to implement sufficient security controls and information management capabilities to allow sensitive, secure information in their Microsoft 365 environment and support a BYOD policy for employees.

To secure the Microsoft 365 environment and data, Protiviti used Microsoft 365 compliance center and Microsoft Purview Information Protection. Information management controls such as retention labels and retention label policies automatically applied information security classification to files, enabling the department to use and manage protected information inside the repository.

Enabling the use and storage of more sensitive information significantly increased the volume of information that can be housed and leveraged inside Microsoft 365, which reduced reliance on legacy systems. Using the Information Protection products, the department's project team selected Authentication Context via Azure Conditional Access to disable personal devices from accessing anything deemed too sensitive for BYOD. That enabled the department to limit highly sensitive information to be accessed on managed devices only.

A More Secure and Effective Remote Work Solution

By implementing an enterprise process to provide a comprehensive solution for collaboration, communication, and as an authoritative information repository for the organisation's content, the client can now align enterprise information standards across the organisation, greatly increasing their ability to work and communicate effectively. Streamlining their solution and using Microsoft 365 features not only improves their efficiency and access to information, but also allows them to exponentially increase the total percentage of information that will be managed effectively, with proficient oversight.

Prior to this project, the department used separate tools for collaboration and for storing official records and resources of business value, resulting in

repositories containing only what individuals placed in them as part of their records management procedures. Moving to Microsoft 365 empowers them to store most of their information in one place, without the need to manage and move additional copies, as they will be able to apply concepts such as retention, disposition, eDiscovery and information security classification at a far wider scope.

The department's project team recognised that using Microsoft 365 reduces risk at the enterprise level — including reputational and legal risk — by providing an effective system to enforcing the organisation's retention and disposition schedule according to the government's requirements.

By streamlining all information management onto one platform, following a data migration, the department can remove legacy third-party systems to save on licensing costs and reduce the manual effort staff spend working between different systems. With a total of up to 140,000 potential users relying on this system, including a segment of staff members operating strictly on BYOD policies, the impact of improving efficiency and workflow in one streamlined solution cannot be understated.

Looking to the future

The impact of this project extends beyond empowering the department's staff to deliver secure and compliant information management capabilities with secured and remote modern work capabilities. With this solution, Protiviti has helped the client successfully present to the government's Enterprise Architecture Review Board to be granted initial approval as a pathfinder organisation for the use of Microsoft 365 and an official Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS). This endorsement would allow the department to move forward and implement Microsoft 365 as an EDRMS, opening the door to other departments within the government to begin adoption of more Microsoft 365 enterprise features, while driving innovation and change as other departments within the government modernise their information and records management practices.

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