

2025-26 DCIG TOP 5



MICROSOFT 365 SAAS BACKUP SOLUTIONS // ENTERPRISE EDITION

Afi Microsoft 365 Backup

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SOLUTION

Afi Microsoft 365 Backup

COMPANY

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DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF AFI MICROSOFT 365 BACKUP

- Can use encryption key management systems from other cloud providers.
- Capacity-based software licensing option.
- Multi-geo feature can store backups in different regions to comply with data sovereignty laws.
- Multiple parameters to control user access to Microsoft 365 backups.
- Public API that MSPs can use to automate monitoring and managing Afi accounts.

CATEGORIES OF FEATURES EVALUATED

- Backup.
- Billing, configuration, & licensing.
- Cyber resilience.
- Recovery and restore.
- Technical support and service.

Organizations Deepen and Expand Their Use of Microsoft 365

2025 officially represents the twelfth year in which enterprises have had access to Microsoft 365 (formerly known as Office 365).¹ From its humble beginnings in 2013, its stratospheric growth began in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Possessing about 20 million users in 2020, Microsoft 365 has since grown to over 430 million paid commercial users worldwide.² Further, the estimated number of active monthly Microsoft Teams users exceeds 300 million. Microsoft Teams especially has had great success in enterprises, where 93% of Fortune 100 companies utilize it for communications.³

Having an established foothold in organizations of all sizes, Microsoft has already taken steps to strengthen its presence in them. Two specific Microsoft 365 features that more midmarket enterprises utilize include:

- **Microsoft Entra.** Formerly known as Azure Active Directory, Microsoft Entra serves as the foundational identity management platform within Microsoft 365. It provides baseline security services such as single sign-on (SSO), multi-factor authentication (MFA), and user governance. It also provides more advanced services such as managing and securing AI agents that access enterprise resources.⁴
- **Microsoft Power Platform.** Centralizing and consolidating applications and data in Microsoft 365 create opportunities for enterprises to improve internal work processes. Microsoft Power Platform tools, such as Power Automate and Power BI, equip them to automate workflows and visualize their data.

Microsoft Copilot, Microsoft 365's built-in artificial intelligence (AI) tool, serves as the backbone for the Microsoft Power Platform. Copilot performs tasks ranging from writing emails to summarizing reports to providing deeper insights into existing data.

Since Copilot also accesses information within an enterprise's Microsoft 365 data repository, it provides specific insights germane to that enterprise. These capabilities have already prompted some enterprises to deploy Copilot company-wide.⁵

This combination of enterprises utilizing Microsoft 365's existing functionality and adoption of new features highlights Microsoft 365's entrenchment in them. Microsoft 365's existing features have already impacted how individuals within enterprises communicate and interact with one another. Its new features further enhance how they manage and secure their data, gain insights into it, and automate repetitive or mundane tasks.

Yet as more enterprises embrace Microsoft 365, they must account for how they will protect data stored in it. This task becomes ever more complex as enterprises utilize Microsoft 365's existing and new features.

They must minimally establish how third-party Microsoft 365 software-as-a-service (SaaS) backup solutions protect Exchange, OneDrive, SharePoint, and Teams. Enterprises adopting Entra and Power Platform should also consider protecting their data hosted in these offerings as well.

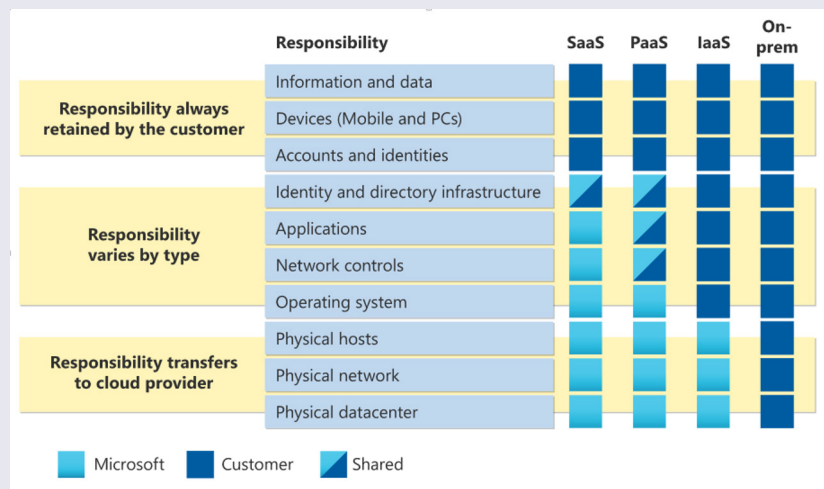
Support for backing up data in these new Microsoft 365 options remains nascent. Concerned enterprises should therefore consider the roadmap a provider has for protecting data in these new Microsoft 365 features.

Cloud-based, third-party Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions often provide the best option for enterprises to perform holistic backup and recovery.

Data Stored in Microsoft 365 Remains Your Responsibility

Enterprises adopt Microsoft 365 largely driven by the business value that Microsoft 365 delivers. They gain access to Exchange, OneDrive, SharePoint, and Teams while alleviating themselves of the tasks associated with hosting Microsoft 365. However, one responsibility remains with midmarket enterprises.

They retain the responsibility to protect the data and user identity information that they store in Microsoft 365. While many organizations now understand this responsibility, up to 30 percent may still not have a backup strategy in place.⁶



Source: Microsoft⁷

Microsoft does use terms such as data availability and protection when discussing Microsoft 365's features. However, enterprises should view these references primarily in the context of high availability (HA) and data security. For instance, Microsoft hosts Microsoft 365 in highly available Microsoft Azure data centers. Further, Microsoft physically secures these data centers and employs antivirus and firewall software to protect data from attacks.

Microsoft 365 even offers some limited data protection capabilities. Its Deleted Items and Recycle Bin utilities retain recently deleted data, and permit restores of deleted emails and files.

However, enterprises should not equate these two utilities with backup software that holistically protects data stored in Microsoft 365. Cloud-based, third-party Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions often provide the best option for midmarket enterprises to perform holistic backup and recovery.

The State of Microsoft 365 SaaS Backup Solutions

Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions have continued to mature and improve significantly since DCIG last evaluated them in 2023. Further, enterprises have more Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions from which to choose, with over 20 available offerings.

Many of the benefits of these Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions remain unchanged from DCIG's last evaluations. Examples of the benefits that most of these solutions continue to offer include:

- Backup Microsoft Exchange, OneDrive, SharePoint, and Teams
- Encrypt Microsoft 365 backups.
- Free trial periods (typically 15 – 30 days)
- May subscribe online to the solution.

To ensure all Microsoft 365 user data gets protected, many Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions can adapt to changes in Microsoft 365.

- May immediately schedule backups of Microsoft 365 data.
- Provider handles all back-of-house administrative tasks associated with hosting its solution. These tasks include hosting and scaling the solution as well as performing ongoing software fixes, patches, and updates, among other jobs.
- Store backups on cloud object storage from one or more cloud providers.

However, other features have changed and matured. These include the following.

Billing

Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions typically assess charges based on the following two components: a per-user fee and backup storage consumption. The per-user fee correlates to the number of Microsoft 365 licenses that an enterprise has.

To ensure all Microsoft 365 user data gets protected, many Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions can adapt to changes in Microsoft 365. As the number of Microsoft 365 users increases or decreases, the SaaS backup solution may dynamically increase or decrease its number of licenses.

Many providers also charge fees for backup storage costs, though how they charge varies by provider. Some calculate storage costs based on the total amount of backup data stored on the backend storage devices. Others calculate how much Microsoft 365 data they need to protect before they back it up. They then bill for storage based upon that calculated total.

Backing up Microsoft Teams

Support for Microsoft Teams across all Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions represents one notable difference since DCIG's last evaluation. While most solutions supported Microsoft Teams two years ago, all now back up Teams data.

Enterprises should still exercise caution when selecting a solution to protect Microsoft Teams. In the background, Microsoft Teams leverages SharePoint and OneDrive for specific Teams messaging and file sharing activities.

This approach results in Teams storing some messages and files in SharePoint and others in OneDrive. How well or even if a Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solution protects messages and files in both SharePoint and OneDrive varies.

Lack of support for Microsoft Teams did prompt DCIG to not formally evaluate one new Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solution, Microsoft 365 Backup. A notable entrant into the backup space, Microsoft 365 Backup currently only backs up Exchange, OneDrive, and SharePoint.⁹

DCIG views support for Teams backup as critical to a comprehensive Microsoft 365 backup solution. Currently, only third-party Microsoft 365 backup solutions, such as DCIG evaluated, offer this functionality.

Backup Storage Targets

Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions manage the underlying storage on which the backups reside, often providing a default storage option. However, some offer options on where to store their Microsoft 365 backups with choices varying between backup solutions. Consider:

- Some only store backups in the provider's cloud.
- Others give enterprises a choice of cloud storage targets from one or more providers.
- Some can place or tier backups based on cost, location, or performance characteristics.
- A few offer the option to use an enterprise's on-premises storage.

Cyber resilience in Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions has gone from an afterthought to a core component across all solutions.

Once configured, enterprises rarely need to have concerns about sufficient storage capacity for their backups. However, enterprises that must meet specific budgets or recovery requirements should select solutions that give them control over where they place their backups.

Cyber Resilience

Cyber resilience in Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions has gone from an afterthought to a core component across all solutions. Cyber resilience may show up in any of the following ways in these solutions:

- Anomaly detection.
- Data encryption
- Data immutability.
- Data loss prevention
- Ransomware detection.

Anomaly and ransomware detection have received the most attention from these providers over the last two years. This stems in large part from Microsoft 365 being the most common way that bad actors attempt to infiltrate midmarket enterprises.

To detect anomalies and ransomware, many providers have introduced artificial intelligence (AI) into their respective solutions. However, their detection capabilities vary widely, with each one using different algorithms and techniques to identify anomalies and ransomware. Many also use AI for data loss prevention to limit and stop sensitive data from leaving the organization.

Responses to detected or suspected anomalies or instances of ransomware also vary. Some merely send out alerts that they have detected a threat. Others take more proactive steps, such as quarantining specific users or instances after identifying a threat. Some solutions can even recover an affected file or message without any intervention by a user or administrator.

Data encryption and immutability come into play to protect backups. Many Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions utilize the Cloud Lock feature available on cloud object storage. This prevents ransomware from changing, deleting, or encrypting already stored backups during an attack. All providers can also encrypt backups, which makes backups unreadable to bad actors should they obtain a copy of the backup.

SaaS Backup Hosting

All SaaS backup solution providers host their respective solution in a highly available data center. However, the cloud data center each provider uses varies by provider. Consider:

- Over half of the providers can host their solution with a third-party cloud provider such as Amazon Web Services (AWS) or Google Cloud Platform (GCP).
- Approximately half of the evaluated solutions can host their SaaS backup solution in Microsoft Azure.
- Another third can host their solution in a purpose-built cloud that the provider owns or leases.

While greater than 100 percent of the total, it stems from some providers hosting their solution in multiple clouds. Some enterprises may want this flexibility for different reasons. Some may already use a specific cloud (AWS, Azure, or GCP). Still others may prefer a purpose-built cloud as it offers more predictable cloud costs and defined disaster recovery (DR) options. Regardless of the solution, the provider often includes a service level agreement (SLA) of 99.5% or higher for high availability.

Enterprises may use key management systems (KMS) from multiple providers or use Afi's own Afi-managed data encryption.

Afi Microsoft 365 Backup

Upon DCIG's completion of reviewing over 20 Microsoft 365 SaaS backup solutions, DCIG ranked Afi Microsoft 365 Backup as a TOP 5 solution. Afi focuses on protecting enterprise data and workloads hosted in various clouds, Kubernetes, and SaaS environments. Afi offers Microsoft 365 protection through monthly, annual, and multi-year plans that enterprises may cancel at any time. If cancelled, Afi refunds any part of an enterprise's unused, prepaid subscription period.

Afi provides granular levels of backup for Exchange, OneNote, SharePoint, and Teams. While it automatically backs up all items in these four Microsoft 365 components, enterprises may deselect specific items for backup. Enterprises may also control the frequency of Afi backups using its Enterprise edition which supports up to 24 backups daily.

Additional features that help distinguish Afi Microsoft 365 Backup from other TOP 5 solutions include:

- **Capacity-based software licensing option.** Afi by default, or automatically, licenses its software based upon the number of active users. This model dynamically adjusts licenses up or down based upon the number of active users. Afi also allocates each user license a fixed amount of backup storage capacity. However, enterprises may opt to use Afi's capacity-based software licensing model. Using this option, enterprises only pay for backup capacity consumed while still getting all Afi Microsoft 365 backup features.⁹
- **Microsoft 365 multi-geographic configuration option.** Enterprises that operate globally often must account for country-specific data sovereignty laws that govern data collection, generation, and storage. Using Afi's multi-geo feature, enterprises may comply with differing regional data sovereignty laws. Afi can store Microsoft 365 backup data in a region that corresponds to where the enterprise created the data. Enterprises may also configure Afi to store backups in multiple regions simultaneously.¹⁰
- **Supports bring your own encryption keys (BYOK) from other cloud providers.** To encrypt backups, enterprises may use key management systems (KMS) from multiple providers. Enterprises may opt to use Afi's own Afi-managed data encryption. Additionally, enterprises may choose KMS offerings from AWS, Google or Microsoft Azure and then manage their own encryption keys. Using their own encryption keys enterprises may suspend or revoke Afi application access to their backups at any time.¹¹
- **Multiple parameters to control user access to Microsoft 365 backups.** Afi permits enterprises to grant permissions to users to access their own backup data and perform self-service restores. However, Afi also includes multiple settings that control the degree and time to which users may access and act on backup data.

For instance, Afi can limit users to only browsing their backup data and previewing email and chat content. Alternatively, Afi can permit them to perform in-place recoveries and data exports. When granting these privileges, Afi can apply an expiration date that limits how long users can perform these actions.¹² ■

Microsoft 365 SaaS Backup Solutions // Enterprise Edition

Afi Microsoft 365 Backup

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