acora ONE

YOUR MICROSOFT JOURNEY

YOUR GUIDE

THE MICROSOFT WAY

INTRODUCTION

At Acora One, we work with small and medium-sized businesses at every stage in their Microsoft journey. In this brief guide, we look at where that journey begins, the landmarks along the way, the benefits you'll gain as you progress, and how we can help you navigate the Microsoft's ever-evolving products and technologies in the longer term.

As a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME), you're almost certainly on your own Microsoft journey – even if you don't realise it or put it in those exact terms.

In fact, you've been on it ever since you started using Outlook for your email, and Word, Excel and PowerPoint for your everyday documents, spreadsheets and decks.

We understand that some businesses, particularly freelancers, tradespeople and other one-person bands, don't need to go much further that. However, as your business grows, and especially once you have people working remotely or on multiple sites, SMEs, things get more complex.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS...

For most SMEs – which in our world is an organisation with between 10 and 250 users - the journey that really matters is the one from on-premise IT infrastructure (with software hosted on your own servers) to a fully cloud-based environment, with everything hosted on a public platform.

In our experience, it's usually prompted by a need for significant investment in new hardware, and/or additional software licenses, promoted by the business's growth or other changing circumstances.

It's a big step to take and, understandably, many SMEs are concerned about the costs and practicalities of migrating.

As one of the world's biggest cloud service providers, Microsoft has recognised the need for a clear path to adoption, one that allows SMEs to enhance their capabilities and stay competitive, at their own pace and in line with their specific needs.

Welcome to the Microsoft Modern Workplace.
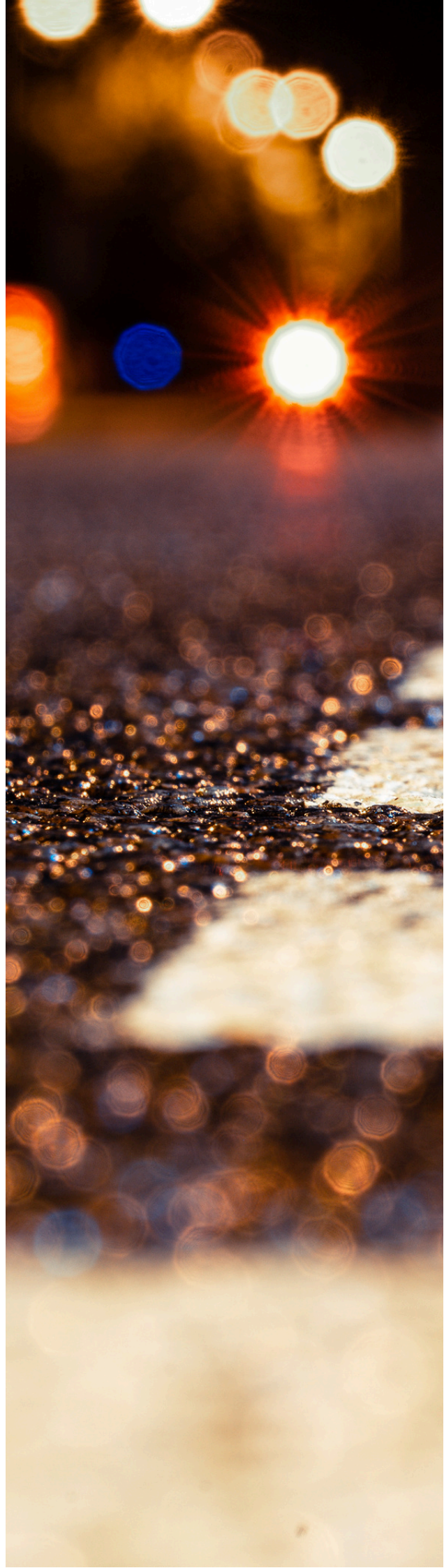
CHANGING HOW SMES VIEW AND USE MICROSOFT PRODUCTS

Microsoft Modern Workplace is designed to create a flexible, secure and efficient IT environment for the way many of us work and run our businesses today. Importantly, it's more than just a set of tools and applications.

It's a new way of thinking about IT infrastructure, built around maximising flexibility and scalability, consolidating and streamlining day-to-day tasks, and empowering people to collaborate online.

The great advantage of Microsoft Modern Workplace is that it's not all-or-nothing, or one-size-fits-all. Its inherent flexibility and scalability mean you can introduce the tools you need, as and when you need them, based on your specific business and users' needs.

For most SMEs, the journey begins (if it hasn't already done so) with a package pretty much everyone will know.

OFFICE 365

The Microsoft cloud offering is built on Office 365, which includes the basic Office productivity tools you use every day - Outlook, Word, Excel and PowerPoint, and OneDrive cloud storage.

If you're currently hosting these applications yourself on your own servers, moving to the cloud-based versions will be your first move.

ALL TOGETHER NOW

Microsoft Teams was launched in 2017. In its first two years, it gained around 20 million users worldwide. Then came Covid.

In 2020, that number jumped to 75 million, then to 145 million in 2021, before hitting 320 million, across more than a million organisations worldwide, in 2023.

If you have people working remotely or on different sites, your journey will almost inevitably lead you to introducing Teams.

Teams makes it easy for people to chat, hold video meetings and share files and folders through a single application, wherever they are.It's the key to effective collaboration and hybrid working – and, love it or loathe it, for many of us it's now hard to imagine life without it.

Depending on your needs, you might also consider adding Teams Phone – Microsoft's cloud-based alternative to a conventional telephony system.

SECURITY DETAIL

In the past, when all your users and devices were safely on your premises, most security risks could be mitigated with standard antivirus software and a basic firewall.

However, the shift to remote work, mobile devices, and cloud-based platforms means your security cordon needs to extend beyond your network perimeter to include user and device identities.

We configure and manage Microsoft Entra Conditional Access services, combined with Microsoft 365 account cloud logins and identity protection policies, to provide all-around Microsoft protection for your business.

The clue to Conditional Access is in the title: it sets conditions for who can access your business cloud and data.

As well as providing stronger protection for user identities, Single Sign-On (SSO) can allow users to log in to third-party customer relationship management (CRM) and accounting systems, Adobe Creative Cloud, and other applications using their Microsoft account.

This eliminates the need for multiple logins and passwords, enhancing security and reducing the risk of credential theft.

IN TUNE WITH YOUR BUSINESS

We use another Microsoft service, Intune, alongside it to protect data on company and personal smartphones, tablets and laptops through mobile device management (MDM) and at the app level through mobile application management (MAM).

Conditional Access interacts with signals from Microsoft Intune to read policy parameters and validate login requests, enabling you to keep your data secure while allowing your users to work from any device in any location.
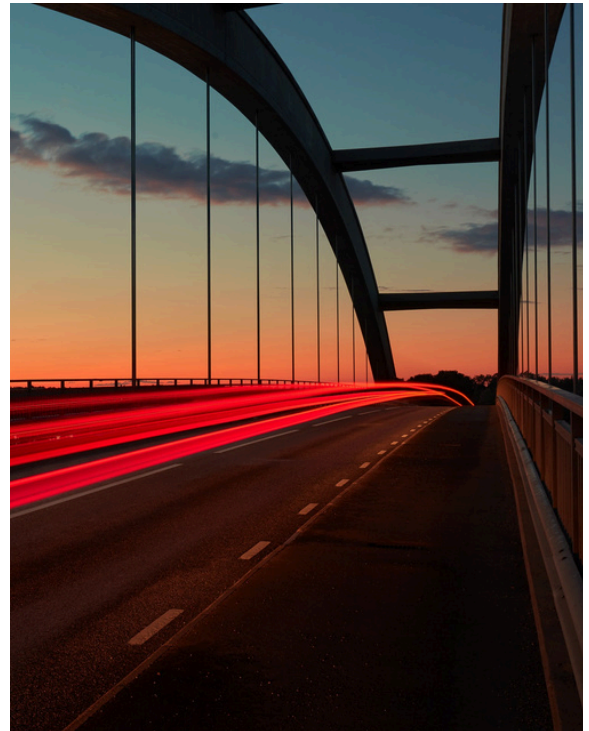
THE BENEFITS FOR SMES

Embarking on the Microsoft cloud journey is a step change for your business. Hosting everything on-site, does give you a high degree of control.

It also means you have to manage, maintain, update and optimise everything yourself. Migrating to Microsoft 365 allows you to hand over a lot of the upkeep and security, while retaining full ownership of (and responsibility for) your own data and user identities.

The Microsoft Modern Workplace recognises and responds to the reality that the way we work has changed profoundly.

For today's SMEs, going cloud-based can offer many technical, commercial and practical benefits.

THE BENEFITS FOR SMES

Scalability
Microsoft's cloud solutions are designed to fit your business and its needs at any given point. As you grow and your needs increase, you can add capacity and capabilities; and if circumstances change, you can simply scale back without losing anything essential.

Flexibility
The Microsoft Modern Workplace is made up of multiple products, allowing you to pick and choose the ones best suited to your business needs and budget. As a Microsoft Partner, we have the skills and knowledge to customise and optimise each product to your specific requirements. For an SME, it provides the kind of powerful, bespoke solution formerly enjoyed only by enterprise-grade clients, but far more cost-effectively. Everything you need, nothing you don't.

Accessibility
Microsoft Modern Workplace makes hybrid and remote working straightforward and practical. As well as giving your current team greater flexibility and boosting their productivity, being able to offer flexible working is now a must if you want to recruit and retain the best talent.

Security
We use Intune for device management, deploying policies and apps to individual machines, with Entra ID and specifically conditional access ensuring Identity security. At Acora One, we also have our own in-house cybersecurity team with solutions and expertise to protect your data and wider infrastructure.

Collaboration
File- and folder-sharing through SharePoint and OneDrive makes it easy for your people to contribute to projects wherever they happen to be working. And with Teams, they don't have to be in the office to stay in contact, work together in groups and feel they're truly part of the organisation.

Always up-to-date
Microsoft is constantly updating and improving its products and services. Being cloud-based means you don't have to worry about keeping up: they're all taken care of at the back end, so you can be sure you're always working with the latest-and-greatest version.
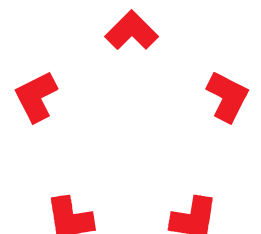
THE BENEFITS FOR SMES

Reduced IT costs
As we mentioned earlier, the trigger for many SMEs to consider moving to the cloud is an impending big investment in new hardware or software licences.

As well as avoiding that expense, cloud-based solutions also eliminate the cost of maintaining your own servers and other infrastructure, or employing suitably qualified people if you don't have a dedicated IT team.

And because our cloud packages are scalable, you can spend as much or as little as you need to based on your specific business needs at a particular moment.

Improved user experience
Flexible working is here to stay. For those who want to, being able to work seamlessly and easily from home (or anywhere else) is better for their productivity, morale and mental health.

Those who ARE in the office also benefit from simple, secure communication and information-sharing with their remote-working colleagues.

MAKING THE TRANSITION

The good news is that, for your users, the cloud journey doesn't change things very much on a practical level. They'll continue to use their existing Microsoft email address, and applications will look and work exactly as they always have done.

The only real difference is that files and folders will need to be saved to a different drive to enable sharing. From a management perspective, there's a clear transition path.

First, our solutions team will thoroughly assess your current IT infrastructure, business needs and pain points. From this, we'll draw up a comprehensive project plan with costs, timings and waypoints.

With this signed off, our installation specialists will set everything up and handle the migration itself.

Once that's complete and it's all working as it should, they'll hand off to our support team, who'll look after you and your users thereafter.

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

LET'S TALK!

Migrating to the cloud is a journey, not a destination, and a process, not an event. Once you're up and running, you'll find your IT environment is running on a constant virtuous cycle: Microsoft upgrades or replaces a productivity tool; we optimise it for your specific systems; your productivity increases; there's another upgrade; and so on.

And the best thing from your standpoint is that we handle all of it: it's all going on in the background, and you can focus on your core business activities.

READY TO TAKE THAT STEP?

We'll start by establishing where you on your Microsoft journey, then go from there. To arrange an initial, no-obligation conversation, please call us on (01603) 431200 or email info@acora.one

To find out more about who we are and what we do, please visit www.acora.com/one