# Syscon U

What's New

In much of the US, the cooler days mean colorful fall leaves. For all of us, it's shorter days and longer nights. For those of us who have a fun streak, it might mean decorating the yard, going for a hay ride, and visiting a pumpkin patch. I'll be in the candy aisle looking for candy corn pumpkins!

We are very excited to share two new security solutions: DNS Filtering and Simeon Cloud. We'll have some articles that have more about what these are and what they do along with some short video updates in the coming weeks.

Congratulations to our entire team! We have earned the Microsoft Solution Partner designation! - *Catherine Wendt*

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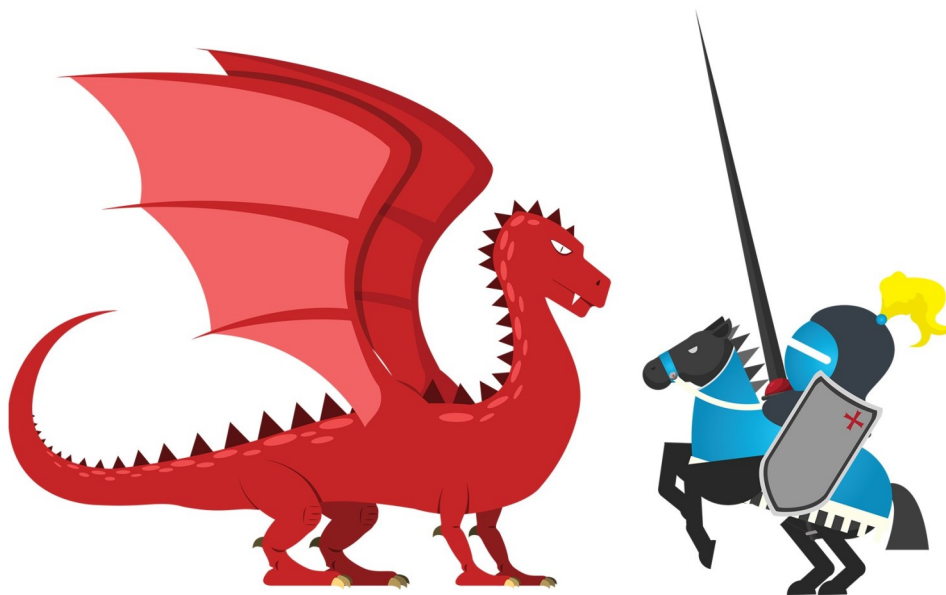
Microsoft 365 Monitoring: We Had a Vision

For about a year now, our programming team had a project on the 'wish' list regarding our Managed Microsoft 365 offering. How could we determine a baseline that included backups, MFA setup, and a host of our standard configurations across all our M365 customers? Then with that baseline, write a monitoring tool that would tell us when any account is outside our standards, has deviated from the baseline, has unexpected or non-standard changes to a user's account, and other important flags.

Why would this be helpful? Imagine we could see non-standard changes in real-time; see accounts that were not enforced with MFA; get in front of risky behaviors or configurations. This would be amazing for our clients and a very pro-active way to stay ahead of security. Basically, we could sleep at night!

One of the primary concerns we've wrestled with is inconsistent configurations. We've been doing this a while, so we have a clear vision of what works and what doesn't and the most secure way to setup a new Microsoft tenant. How do we make sure all the steps were followed, correctly? For clients we co-manage, how do we know when inconsistent configurations are present or changes are made that we know to be a risk?

A Microsoft tenant is your specific Microsoft account with your domain (s). This is where all the rules and policies are setup and enforced for existing and new accounts. It's also a place where we can make policy changes to address new risks or issues we've run into, keeping you safe.

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Another big item is the ability to Backup and if needed, Restore configurations. Maybe changes were made and rolled out to all users, but need to be rolled back. Maybe a bad actor has entered the environment and started making changes, and we need to knock them out and restore the environment, either in the Microsoft 365 licenses or even in the Azure Active Directory realm (managing your computers outside a traditional network with a server).

Although reporting is important, we're already buried in a ridiculous amount of data! Honing in on critical changes with appropriate alerts and monitoring allows us to target and address the things that are most at risk. Tracking historical changes is very important, especially if there should be a breach incident and logs are needed, requested, required by third parties such as Cyber Insurance carriers.

We have a growing number of clients taking advantage of InTune. With the Premium level licenses in place, InTune allows us to deploy new equipment much more efficiently in a fraction of the time, with amazing accuracy. There are some very specific configurations that are needed, and some maintenance, all of which have resulted in clients with 15 minutes to roll out a new computer rather than the typical 4 hours we have historically quoted and spent! Imagine replacing 15 or more computers—that's quite a savings. For our techs, it's a game changer, greatly reducing the potential that a special step for that specific client was missed. These are configured by client, so they can be customized to meet the need.

For those of you who are interested in, or need to comply with NIST or CMMC, there are some specific requirements. Using this new tool, we can configure and monitor to stay in compliance with these regulations.

The ability to enforce agreed policies across the Microsoft 365 licenses, sift through the amazing amount of alerts and data, provide backup and restoration of configurations, and identify compliance drift or a possible bad actor are game-changing. Security is so important, and we know

Cathy & Larry Sightings

Catherine and Chris attended a vendor roadshow in Chicago. In October, Catherine is performing two German pieces with French Horn and Piano as part of the Chandler Chamber Series.

Larry is participating in a bike riding event in Tucson in mid-November, so it's time to put in the miles so he's ready!

you count on us to stay on top of it. In the remaining months of 2023, we will roll this out to all our Microsoft tenants and it will become an integral and mandatory part of our managed solutions. Stay tuned for more information and where you are on the schedule! - CMW

"Top line for vanity, bottom line for sanity!"

Book Nook

No Ego by Cy Wakeman

This book was recommended by one of our clients (thanks Bill). The focus is how leaders can cut the cost of workplace drama, end entitlement, and drive results; something we're all looking for!

The opening chapters talk about the conventional wisdom which says you should have an open door policy. This was a huge time drain and felt more like inviting people to keep their unproductive narrative going than to talk through issues and find resolutions. In her then-new role as a manager, she started asking: "What do you know for sure?" "What is your part in this?" "What are your ideas for resolving this issue?" "What are you doing to help?" As you might

image, the answers were often filled with all the problems and why it was not *their* problem!

The next section talks about sympathy versus empathy. Sympathy is feeling sorry for someone, agreeing they're at the mercy of their circumstances. Empathy is acknowledging their suffering, then separating the suffering from reality with a call to greatness!

Ms. Wakeman refers to her research and their Reality-Based Leadership training, citing data gathered over many years of consulting. Other topics include how the Ego plays into the stories we tell ourselves and others. In a study of two groups, one group focused on how to make their own lives better; the other focused on ways they could help their patients. I'd rather work with the second group! Lots of great stuff in here. Definitely worth reading. - *CMW*

Microsoft Designation Change

We were pretty excited when after months of phone calls, questionnaires, and navigating their website, we earned the Microsoft Cloud Provider designation. From there, we were able to engage directly with Microsoft (rather than through a third party). It's been quite a journey!

But that's not the end of it. Now we have to maintain our status! We even set some lofty goals to earn a couple of new Microsoft Certifications across our teams. Last month, after Matt passed the last certification test for his goal, we received the official word—we are now Microsoft Solution Providers, and in mid-September, Microsoft AI Cloud Providers.

With these in place, we can continue to advocate for our clients directly with Microsoft. We also stay up-to-date with Microsoft changes, allowing us to sift through what's new, finding what our clients need when using technology tools to run their business. - *CMW*

True People Search—Disturbing

Chris and I were driving to an event sponsored by Professional Women in Construction. He received a solicitation, to his cell phone related to our industry. Chris was polite but said it was his personal cell phone. He also asked how the person got his phone number. That's where it got interesting.

Turns out he got Chris's name through True People Search. So after he hung up, we took a look. It had his last several addresses, his cell phone, and plenty of other personal details and contacts. We're not naïve—we know there are many groups that scrape the internet for personal information and we certainly don't think our lives are completely private, but this was truly eye-opening.

We appreciate the guy's honesty, but we would also say that whether this info is available or not, to call our personal cell phone in the early evening for a business solicitation, unrequested, is not appropriate or professional. —*CMW*

Enterprise Apps: The Next Attack Vector

Chris has been saying this for months! Enterprise Apps are just too tempting for the bad actors, so we're pretty sure they're going to focus on using Enterprise Apps as their next mode of attack.

Enterprise Apps are used in a variety of ways, many absolutely legit and very important. One examples is our iPhone users. There is an Apple App that when installed allows your phone to connect with your Microsoft 365 email. Imagine a bad actor hijacks that app, or makes one that looks like the original and you download the 'fake' one to your device; now they're in!

- SaaS (software as a service) - too many apps creates fragmentation and confusion, even for you; what to use and when?
- App Sprawl—a business unit or department purchases Apps without including the IT team, creating 'Shadow IT' running outside the Tech group; definitely a security problem.
- This often leads to mitigating attacks after they happen rather than pro-active planning.
- At one of our clients, email was compromised then bad actors installed Perfectdata, an enterprise app to keep access without the user.

We recommend a company policy that says any app that will allow two or more programs to talk to each other and will be installed on any company device with company data should be reviewed by IT before installing. Is this inconvenient? Yes, but not as inconvenient as being hacked! - *CMW*

⚒ CONSTRUCTION CORNER

Financial Statement—Some Basics

In a previous article we discussed the pro's and con's of focusing on cash. It's a very important piece, but doesn't tell the whole story for a variety of reasons. So other than cash, as important as it is, what else should you be looking for in the Financial statement if you're not the bookkeeper or controller?

The Financial report (2-8 in S100C) is broken down into two sections: the Balance sheet which are your assets (what you own that has value), your liabilities (what you owe), and the equity (earnings for this year and prior less distributions) and the Income Statement.

Let's start with the Balance Sheet. The first section is your Assets, the items of value. There are Current Assets, cash on hand and things you can receive or 'cash in' within the next 12 months. There are Long Term Assets, which represent assets that would take longer to 'cash in' or claim.

Current Assets are things like cash accounts, CD's, and liquid funds. They also include Employee Loans, Accounts Receivable, and similar. Other examples are PrePaid expenses and insurance that will be 'used up' in the coming year such as paying the full year's insurance premiums at the beginning of the policy, a full year's support for a software

Phone Scams—Banks

The latest ridiculous scam? The incoming phone number looks like it's coming from your bank, but it's not your bank that's calling! They are able to spoof the bank's phone number so the caller ID makes it look like it's the bank. Don't fall for this one! Call your personal banker!

program, an implementation or project you're rolling out in the coming months that required a deposit, things like that.

Long Term assets are things that would take longer to turn into cash. These might include loans you've made where you will be paid back in more than 12 months. This could be property you own (Fixed Assets) that would have to be sold to turn into cash.

> *"The Balance Sheet is broken down into two sections: your assets (what you own of value) and your liabilities (what you owe)."*

The next section is Equity. This includes the original purchase of stock, retained earnings, less Distributions, and Profit to-date in the current year. Basically, at the end of any year, it's your total income less your total expenses which is a Gross Profit that rolls to your Retained Earnings at the beginning of the next year. If you're an S-Corp, these profits flow through to your K-1 and you pay taxes on them. That means you can draw these Retained earnings in the following year(s) as after-tax dollars.

The next section of the report is referred to as the Income Statement. This summarizes all Income from work performed, less Direct Expenses to do the work, less Indirect Expenses in support of the work, less Overhead/ Administrative/Sales expenses. At the end of this section is the Net Profit (before taxes, of course). There's quite a lot in this Income Statement.

The Income section is all your billing for the month or period of time for the report and often includes any Over/ Under billing net impact. This helps smooth out the roller coaster of income versus expenses by reporting all actual billing (income) and the net result of any

over billing or under billing during the same period of time. You may have a job where you earned revenue but for one or more reasons, weren't able to invoice that month. Or you may have billed for work you expected to perform that was actually delayed, making you overbilled. This is a separate analysis process, but an important part of the Income Statement.

Right below the income are the Direct Expenses. These are costs that have hit specific jobs during the month, directly related to performing the work. It's important to consider if you have 'holding' jobs such as a Shop or other 'fake' job to which you post costs but have no one to invoice. This will definitely impact the Direct Expenses, which impacts your Gross Profit for the reporting period.

The next section may be Indirect Costs, sometimes labeled as Equipment/Shop. In this section of costs, you may be tracking expenses for owned-equipment, running a shop (rent, utilities, shop manager, etc.), project management costs (not job-specific), and similar costs that are part of running the field work, but not attributable to a specific job. This is an important number to track. If you don't have any work, you would still have a shop to run, but you might have fewer project managers and other supporting expenses such as a mechanic or truck driver.

The next two sections are overhead costs. For some clients this is overhead to run the office and overhead related to sales efforts. For others, it's overhead to run the company and Administrative costs such as senior management. Either way, you have to make enough on the actual Gross Profit of the field work to cover these overhead and administrative/sales efforts!

Next month we'll cover some key numbers and percentages you can watch for in these various reports! -*CMW*

AI Tools from Microsoft: Changing the Way You Work!

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is popping up everywhere you look these days. New tools like ChatGPT are powered by Large Language Models (LLMs) that are trained on mountains of data so they can respond to your requests almost as well as a person. There is no doubt that these tools are incredible! The first AI tool from Microsoft is the one we are most excited about; the new Microsoft 365 Copilot which is coming out November 1st. The second started its preview in September.

Microsoft 365 Copilot is an AI powered tool that interacts with your Microsoft 365 data to help you work more efficiently than ever.

- Do you ever wish you could create a proposal automatically from your meeting notes and spec document?
- Do you ever wish you could automatically add animations and fun visuals throughout your PowerPoint presentation?
- What about a recap of a Teams meeting you missed?

Well now you can! In the September 21st Microsoft Event announcing this amazing new tool, Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, summed it up well by saying, "Today marks the next major step in the evolution of how we interact with computing, which will fundamentally change the way we work and unlock a new wave of productivity growth."

Words can't do justice to the amazing power of Microsoft 365 Copilot, so check out a few of these short 1-2 minute videos:

 Scan the QR code with your camera to watch the videos below!

Microsoft 365 Copilot Video: Introducing Copilot in Windows 11, new AI tools and more

Microsoft 365 Copilot—Business Chat

Microsoft 365 Copilot in Teams Meetings

Microsoft 365 Copilot in Outlook

Microsoft 365 Copilot in Excel

Microsoft 365 Copilot in Word

Microsoft 365 Copilot in PowerPoint

One more if you want to know how **Microsoft 365 Copilot works: The Copilot System Explained by Microsoft**

I can hear you thinking 'Oh wow! This is so amazing! How much is this going to cost?!?" It will be $30/user/month. Is that expensive? Cheap? When I first heard the price my gut reaction was that it was quite expensive. Then I thought, 'what if this can save me just 10 minutes per day?' That would work out to about 200 minutes (over 3 hours) per month. So as long as someone is making over $10/hour, it's totally worth it!

The second AI tool from Microsoft is built right into Windows—the new **Copilot for Windows** was available in preview starting September 26th. How is this different from Microsoft 365 Copilot? While they have many similarities, Microsoft 365 Copilot is focused on interacting with your company data in Microsoft 365. Copilot for Windows is focused on interacting with your computer and the work you do on your computer.

- Trying to arrange all the windows on your screen nicely?
- Trying to find the setting to turn on dark mode?
- Need a summary of the webpage you're looking at?
- Want to remove the background from an image in your clipboard?

Copilot for Windows can help! Looks like this will only be available for Windows 11 computers, so if you're still on Windows 10, let's get you upgraded!

So let's wrap this up. Microsoft is going 'all in' with AI and they're not alone. AI is going to change the way we work and I for one am very excited with what I'm seeing so far!

Did you ever think we'd get to a place where yelling at your computer actually got you want you wanted? What an amazing time to be alive! We hope you're feeling as excited as we are about the new era of technology. We'll keep you updated with how we're using these tools, how others are incorporating them, and provide regular webinars and short videos with relevant information.—*Chris Wendt*

How Did They Do It?
Brawley Construction

In a revealing dialogue with Sycon, owner Jon Gore opens up about Brawley's remarkable journey over the last 30 years. From a childhood fascination with building to a career in construction management, Gore's path was shaped by his passion for the "people side" of the industry.

The company's roots were originally in FF&E, Interior Design and light renovation, which laid the foundation for its legacy of providing comfort to not only the enlisted personnel and families, but much more. Today they are a full-service General Contractor for both federal and commercial customers, with the ability to design and build facilities and infrastructure of any kind. Collaborative efforts with architects, owners, contractors, and team members, in addition to their in-house capabilities, have been central to their achievements.

Adapting to COVID-19, rapid expansion led to "growing pains." Prioritizing strategic personnel placement and an ex-panded bonding program became essential.

He extends gratitude to Syscon for their role in integrating Microsoft SharePoint and facilitating the journey toward CMMC certification. Embracing the power of teamwork, he confronts daily challenges with a united front.

Jon Gore, Owner

His narrative embodies the principles of relationships, resilience, and future preparedness. Guiding Brawley Construction, he continues to shape structures and craft a legacy that will endure. — *RB*

Fast Facts

Location: Wilmington & Raleigh , NC; Cayce, SC
Specialty: General Construction, ICT and FF&E
Founded: 1992

Read more at www.syscon-inc.com/how-did-they-do-it

Are you interested in having your story featured? Let's talk!

Upcoming Events

Event: Field Time Collection the Easy Way, webinar

Date: Thursday, Oct 19th

Time: 11:00 a.m. Central

Register: www.syscon-inc.com/events

We love this stuff!
We are committed to helping businesses use technology to run their organization successfully and profitably.

This monthly publication provided courtesy of Catherine Wendt, President of Syscon Inc.