



SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

# MessageOps Helps Maximize Value and Take Control of Microsoft CSP



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## THE RISE OF CSP

**S**teady changes over the last decade to the way Microsoft delivers and licenses its products has given customers much more power and flexibility in how they buy cloud services and software. Yet the gradual buildup of the changes means many customers haven't recognized the breadth of the transformation. At the same time, the landscape of partners able to sell licensure to customers has exploded through CSP. It can make the choice of selecting a new licensing partner overwhelming, a situation that leads many customers to stay with their old approaches.

Microsoft's biggest change has been the gradual introduction of the cloud solution provider (CSP) model, which describes both a method of buying Microsoft subscriptions and licenses and the partners who sell through CSP. Multiple moves by Microsoft over the last few years indicate that Microsoft intends for the majority of customers to buy their software under CSP rather than through older licensing models, such as Enterprise Agreements.

CSP licensing arose primarily as a way to get partners to sell Office 365 subscriptions. Microsoft needed to give partners ownership of the buying process to give them an incentive to promote the Software-as-a-Service suite of cloud productivity services and desktop Office licenses to customers. The approach also addressed the very different requirements customers had for buying cloud services compared to traditional software licenses.

### CSP vs. EA

Obtaining the rights to use Microsoft products is very different under CSP than it is under an EA. The most obvious difference involves contract terms. An EA is a three-year minimum deal, while CSP is pay as you go. In payment terms, the CSP approach means organizations can switch their licensing from a capital expense to an operational expense. This is because the EA requires annual up-front payments for each of the three years, while CSP payments occur monthly. An additional process within EA is true-up billing to align the number of licenses with usage, accounting for users who join or leave the organization over the course of the year. CSP doesn't require true-up billing because organizations can add or drop users at any time, paying each month for the exact number of users they have.

Some of the advantages of EA are fading away. While EA previously covered more products in the Microsoft stack, CSP is near parity now. Microsoft has expanded CSP to allow the monthly billing model to cover server CALs, Windows 10 and most other on-premises software, in addition to the cloud services for which the model was originally designed. EA also had been more of a mid-market offering, but Microsoft's requirement

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that EA only cover organizations with more than 500 users or devices is pushing more organizations toward CSP. Finally, due to volume discounts, EA can still be less expensive overall than CSP, but only if organizations carefully monitor software usage to avoid overpaying for licenses they don't need most of the year and are sure to be in full compliance on the licenses they are using.

The main advantages to CSP are the operational expense model, the flexibility to pay for and have as many or as few users on any product as needed in a given month and having product support included in the price. Initial support is provided by the CSP partner with escalation support provided by Microsoft.

### PICKING A LICENSING PARTNER

The rise of CSP brings a new channel structure. In the era of mostly Enterprise Agreements, Microsoft worked with about a dozen Large Account Resellers (LARs), later called Licensing Solution Providers (LSPs), who could transact licensing agreements with end customers in the United States. Similar arrangements, with many of the same LSPs, existed in other geographies.

CSP brings new categories of partners to the mix. The biggest companies in the CSP channel are the Indirect Provider CSPs. These companies act as intermediaries, transacting with Microsoft on one side and with their own channel of Indirect Reseller CSPs on the other side. The Indirect Reseller CSPs work directly with customers, while relying on the Indirect Provider CSP for things like billing infrastructure and often for level 1 and level 2 support. There are fewer than 20 Indirect Provider CSPs in the United States, and perhaps 10,000 Indirect Reseller CSPs. Another group of larger companies are the Direct Provider CSPs. These companies transact with Microsoft, but work directly with customers to provide the Microsoft subscriptions and licenses, the frontline support and, often, other services. Direct CSPs in the United States number in the hundreds.

This channel structure effectively means customers have potentially thousands of CSPs to choose from. Those partners are getting a margin. What do they offer customers for that margin?

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### MESSAGEOPS PUTS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE FIRST

Only some of the Direct Provider CSPs operate at a national scale, and one that has put a major emphasis on customer experience and value around CSP is MessageOps.

MessageOps is a division of Sirius Computer Solutions, a national integrator of technology-based business solutions that span the enterprise, including the datacenter and lines of business. MessageOps was a pioneer of the CSP channel even as Microsoft was experimenting with the model 10 years ago in the days of Office 365's predecessor, the Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS).

From the earliest period, MessageOps sought to differentiate its services around cloud services with the creation of portals that allowed customers to easily add, delete and manage users of Microsoft cloud subscriptions. In the time since, MessageOps has gone from one of the leading BPOS resellers to remain one of the top Direct CSPs in a vastly expanded market, and has continued to enhance the ease of use, power and utility of its tools and services surrounding CSP licensing.

### VALUE-ADDED TOOLS AND SERVICES

MessageOps' main differentiator is the vast array of tools and services that the company delivers through the Microsoft CSP program. The company's many tools and services can be grouped into three main categories: management and reporting; adoption; and turn-key SharePoint and Teams offerings.

#### Management and Reporting

Arguably the largest value add from MessageOps comes under the category of management and reporting. Much of this comes under MessageOps' Inscape brand. Inscape is the engagement layer, which includes interfaces and an orchestration platform.

Within the portal, administrators with the customer company can go into their own Office 365 tenant. From there they can manage users from hiring to retiring with the ability to do real-time additions, changes and removals. MessageOps has built wizards to help with onboarding and offboarding employees, with options that reflect best practices in user management from the company's experience with more than 2,500 customers.

## **MessageOps can generate hundreds of different reports, created from previous real-world needs of customers and often leading to specific actions.**

Part of the power of the portal is that it reduces the need for organizations to have expertise in PowerShell or do their own PowerShell commands, with many common targets of those commands having been built into the interface.

MessageOps is also configured to generate hundreds of different reports, created from previous real-world needs of customers and often leading to specific actions. Part of the reporting and management involves understanding and then optimizing spending on Office 365, Azure and other cloud costs and licensing costs. The portal also allows for drilling into past invoices for trends or details.

Another set of tools surrounds security. Some tools flag problems in an organization's Office 365 or Azure Active Directory (Azure AD) security posture and queue up mitigation steps.

For example, an administrator for a customer can go in and identify users who are forwarding all their emails to an outside email account, which can be evidence of a compromised account or an indication of a disgruntled employee.

Other reports include recommendations surrounding Azure and even mapping reports, showing data such as which Microsoft datacenters house which of a customer's Office 365 mailboxes.

A few actionable tools from MessageOps include online backup, PST file exports, ADP Workforce Now integration and ServiceNow integration.

### **Adoption**

One of the largest inhibitors to getting a full return on investment from Microsoft's cloud tools is all of the value organizations leave on the table when their users don't take advantage of the rich functionality that the Office 365 suite includes.

MessageOps offers a robust training platform aimed at both administrators and, importantly, at end users to help organizations consume all of the services that they're paying for from Office 365.

## **A knowledge base includes more than 2,500 on-demand training clips that organizations can access any time.**

The end-user portal includes access to a self-service help desk and a self-service knowledge base. MessageOps' design goal is to offer multiple answers to common end-user queries to provide different entry points to help with end-user learning and adoption.

As part of that effort, the knowledge base includes more than 2,500 on-demand training clips that organizations can access any time. The portal also includes learning plans with lessons on Office 365, Windows 10 and the Microsoft Office suite generally. MessageOps also provides its customers with Office 365 adoption guides.

Another set of capabilities allows organizational leaders to reach out to email accounts proactively to schedule training on key topics or for a series of sessions. Other tools allow for assessments and visual data reporting to see how much use employees are making of available Microsoft products and capabilities.

Finally, MessageOps has added in gamification capabilities to encourage learners to hit different goals and earn certificates of completion or rewards.

### **Turnkey Teams and SharePoint Offerings**

SharePoint Online is one of the core components of Office 365, right up there with Exchange Online. Another component, Teams, has become a first-class platform for Microsoft. Some organizations take full advantage of SharePoint and Teams and have the expertise on staff to fit those technologies to organizational needs. But for many other organizations, the SharePoint and Teams components of Office 365 go unused.

MessageOps gives those latter organizations four detailed turnkey offerings, built on SharePoint or Teams, that are ready to use to begin getting immediate additional value out of the Office 365 subscription.

The first of those offerings is ROOT, which provides a company intranet. The enterprise gamification capabilities described in the previous section are made available through another of the turnkey offerings, called CROWN. BRANCH is a service that simplifies the

onboarding and offboarding of employees. Finally, MessageOps provides customers with asset and contract management through an offering known as VINE.

## CONCLUSION

Microsoft customers have a wide range of CSP partners to choose from to meet their licensing needs, not just the old LSP community. All CSP partners provide Microsoft SKUs and must provide round-the-clock help desk support. Beyond that the variability in offerings is very wide. MessageOps is continuing to set a high standard for the types, quality, innovativeness and value of services wrapped around Microsoft CSP licensing.

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