

An Introduction to Softalk Share Server

Cost effective Outlook Collaboration



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Softalk Share Server provides full functional Outlook collaboration at a fraction of the cost of Microsoft Exchange. By providing a similarly engineered alternative to an Exchange store, Softalk Share Server provides personal and public folder sharing for small to medium sized businesses with up to 500 users. Unlike many competing products, it is designed to work alongside any existing mail server and so will fit into organizations that are content with their mail server or into organizations that outsource their mail hosting to an ISP.

Softalk Share Server offers a lower cost of ownership than the competition through fast installation, minimal training requirements and ease of administration. The product is designed so that non-technical personnel can perform day-to-day administration tasks.

The Current Options for Outlook collaboration

When used on its own, Outlook provides users with a tool for managing their own data, including email, calendars, contacts and tasks. This data cannot easily be shared with other people. In order to share their data with colleagues, Microsoft intend such users to migrate their data to an Exchange Server. This software will only run on a Windows Server operating system and will also require a 64-bit computer. This requirement significantly adds to the cost and complexity of an Exchange Server implementation.

To overcome this expense, some smaller companies have used 3rd party software applications, which can synchronize data between Personal Folders stores in Outlook. Although affordable and sufficient for the needs of some organizations, such software has its disadvantages:

- A synchronization methodology cannot easily scale to large numbers of users.
- Synchronization can be time consuming and network-resource hungry when synchronizing folders containing a large number of emails with sizeable attachments.
- There can be a significant latency between one user adding a record and a participating user seeing that record.
- Synchronization problems can lead to data duplication.
- User's data remains on the local drive of each computer, making data backup difficult.
- Users access copies of their colleagues' data rather than the actual data. This has further side effects in that the links between certain data items are lost on synchronization.

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The Solution: Softalk Share Server

Softalk Share Server combines the advantage of providing Exchange-like native sharing of Outlook with an easy-to-use solution that has affordable license costs and does not require expensive investments in server hardware.

This solution provides the following benefits:

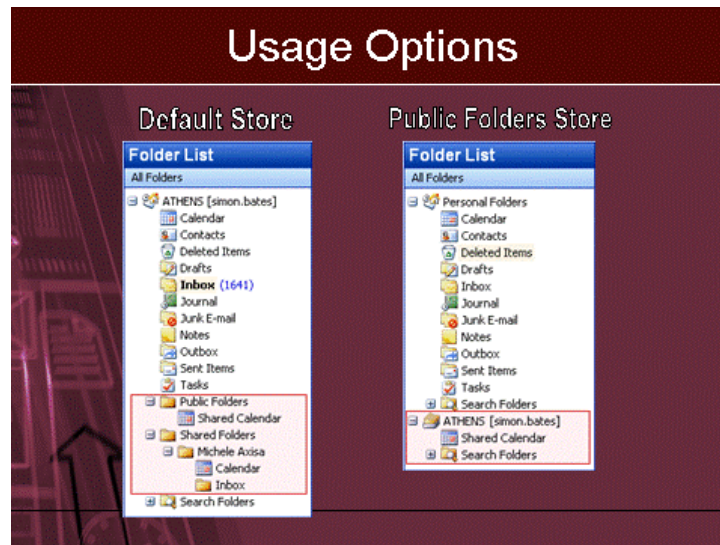
1. Folder data may be shared in real-time with sharing scalable up to 500 users.
2. All users data is held centrally making data backup straight forward.
3. Softalk Share Server provides a comprehensive backup/restore function ensuring that full and incremental backups are created automatically on a daily basis. Any data that is accidentally deleted may be easily restored using the Softalk Share Server administrator program.
4. Changes made in one user's Outlook are seen instantly by participating collaborators, eradicating data latency.
5. Data integrity of linked items is maintained since participating collaborators are sharing the same data, not synchronized copies of the data.
6. Softalk Share Server can, but does not need to, reside on a Windows Server operating system thus avoiding the cost of Windows server licenses and the complexity of an Active Directory.
7. Softalk Share Server can, but does not need to, run on a 64-bit computer, thus avoiding the cost of expensive server hardware.

Softalk Share Server can either sit along-side a user's existing Personal Folders store, providing shared public folders in a secondary store, or it can completely replace a user's Personal Folders store, taking over all the functions of a default store and providing both shared personal folders and shared public folders.

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Two different views of the Outlook folder tree showing the two options for configuring Softalk Share Server

When configured as a default store, the user will perceive no difference compared to using a Personal Folders store, except that an additional Public Folders and Shared Folders entry may exist, giving them access to shared data.

When configured as a public store, the user will still continue using their Personal Folders store, but this will be complemented with a secondary store, showing the user any public folders they have been granted access to.

How it works

Outlook can work with any message store that conforms to the MAPI protocol. Message stores that conform to the MAPI protocol are called MAPI Store Providers and include the Exchange store, the Personal Folders store and the Softalk Share Server store.

Outlook does not store any data itself, but relies on its store provider to do so. When Softalk Share Server is used, Outlook communicates with the Softalk Share Server store provider in order to gain access to all the data held in Softalk Share Server.

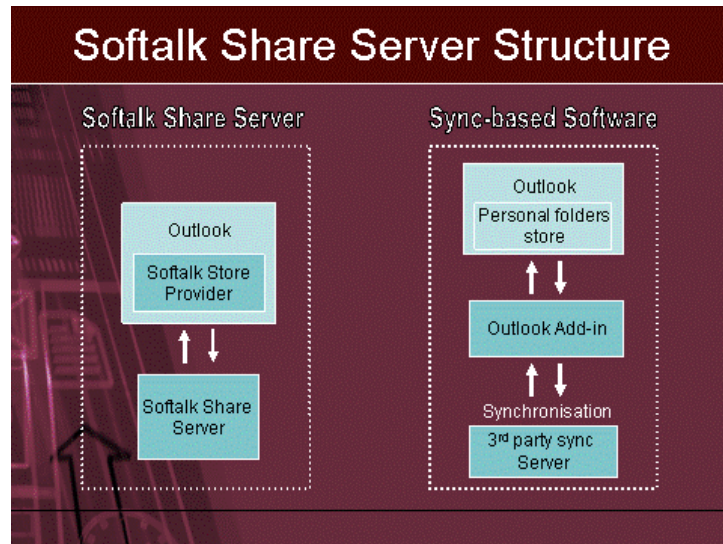
The Softalk Share Server store provider resides on the Outlook computer, but communicates with the server component over a proprietary TCP/IP protocol in order to read/and write the data, which is ultimately stored on the computer designated as the server computer.

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This is a similar architecture to the Outlook / Exchange relationship. The picture below shows how this architecture is different from the solutions, which share Outlook data by synchronizing information between Personal Folders stores.



The contrasting architectures of Softalk Share Server and synchronization based solutions

About Softalk

Softalk provides a range of messaging, collaboration and contact relationship management software solutions specifically designed to benefit small to medium size businesses and organizations. It was set up in 1993 and is a privately held company headquartered in Maidenhead in the UK. For more information visit www.softalkltd.com.

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