ManageEngine
O365 Manager Plus

O365 Manager Plus does what
Office 365 admin center and
PowerShell can't

Introduction

According to a recent **survey by Spiceworks,** 53 percent of businesses use Office 365 for day-to-day business processes, while an additional 17 percent of companies are planning to start using Office 365 within the next two years. If you're planning to move to or are already using Office 365, it's important to be prepared for the challenges that will inevitably arise with an Office 365 setup.

When it comes to native tools, you can manage Office 365 services through the admin center in the Office 365 portal or with PowerShell. Although a combination of the admin center and PowerShell might be enough to meet your Office 365 management needs, both tools come with drawbacks of their own.

In this e-book, we'll discuss how O365 Manager Plus addresses the drawbacks of both the Office 365 admin center and PowerShell when it comes to effective Office 365 administration.

The Office 365 admin center

The Office 365 admin center is the principal management interface for Office 365 services. The admin center offers reports on Office 365 services, monitors service health, manages billing and purchases, and provides access to the specific admin centers associated with each Office 365 service. It may sound comprehensive enough to get the job done, but in reality, the Office 365 admin center falls short in a few critical areas:

- Reports and data provided by the admin center are very limited, and there are no options for creating custom reports for easy data retrieval.

- The activities of every user and admin are audited, but there is no single-click access to quickly acquire the data you need. Instead, you have to use filters from the common audit log bucket.

- The number of bulk management tasks you can perform through the admin center is limited, and the not-so-user-friendly UI doesn't make it any easier. It's also important to note that these limitations extend to bulk management of mailboxes and users as well.

- You won't receive real-time email alerts on service outages; instead, you have to keep an eye on the service health dashboard to learn about outages.

- Monitoring and audit data is only stored for a limited time period.

Office 365 PowerShell

Microsoft's Office 365 PowerShell is a command line shell with its own scripting language, built to help manage cloud assets more efficiently. Whether it's a simple, day-to-day task or a more infrequent, complex one, you can use PowerShell cmdlets to better handle Office 365 objects. With PowerShell, you can:

- Reveal additional information that isn't available in the Office 365 admin center.

- Configure Office 365 features that can only be modified with scripts. That includes customizing Skype for Business meeting invitations, modifying different attributes of multiple users, and adding multiple users to multiple groups at a time.

- Perform bulk operations.

- Filter data based on specific parameters without any restrictions.

- Print or save data easily.

Why Office 365 PowerShell isn't the ideal choice

It's true that PowerShell has some advantages over the admin center, but it still has some drawbacks. For instance:

- To use PowerShell, you'll need adequate scripting knowledge.

- Scripts only get longer the more complex the task is.

- There's no option for automation in PowerShell. You have to provide a script every time you want to perform an action.

O365 Manager Plus

O365 Manager Plus is an extensive Office 365 tool used for reporting, managing, monitoring, auditing, and creating alerts for critical incidents. With its user-friendly interface, you can easily manage Exchange Online, Azure Active Directory, Skype for Business, OneDrive for Business, Microsoft Teams, and other Office 365 services from a single console.

Key features of O365 Manager Plus:

- Provides exhaustive preconfigured reports on Office 365.

- Helps you perform complex tasks, including bulk user management, bulk mailbox management, and secure delegation.

- Monitors Office 365 services around the clock, and sends instant email notifications about service outages.

- Eases compliance management with built-in compliance reports.

- Offers advanced auditing and alerting features to keep your Office 365 setup secure.

In the following sections we'll discuss how O365 Manager Plus provides better control over Office 365 services than the admin center and PowerShell.

Office 365 reporting

Reports on Office 365 help you keep track of what's going on inside your Office 365 setup. While the admin center hosts a small variety of reports on Office 365 services, the data provided by those reports is highly limited. As you can see in the image below, the report on all users provides some information, but at times, you may need more information like contact number, work location, and license details. To view these details, you have to navigate elsewhere, as there is no way to view this information in the report itself.

	Display name ∧	Username	Status
☐	Auto Attendant One	oaa_26d0bdd5dda245d28b06be1c7e97ebeb@z...	Blocked
☐	Bala-Official	bala@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Unlicensed
☐	bhoobalan	bhoobalan@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Unlicensed
☐	Disp Test	DispTest@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Unlicensed
☐	Equipment 1	equipment1@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Unlicensed
☐	Global Admin	globaladmin@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Unlicensed
☐	krishna u	krishna@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Office 365 Enterprise E5
☐	Office 365 Manager Plus Team	ompteam@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Azure Active Directory Premiu...
☐	Pepe	prabahar@zohowsmomp.onmicrosoft.com	Unlicensed
☐	Room 1	room1@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Unlicensed
☐	satish	satish-test@ZOHOWSMOMP.onmicrosoft.com	Unlicensed

In this instance, you can use PowerShell to retrieve additional information. The script below retrieves the name, email address, and title of all Office 365 users in your organization.

```
PS C:\> Connect-MsolService
>> Get-MsolUser -All | Select DisplayName,UserPrincipalName,Title
```

But one major drawback of PowerShell is that you can only retrieve data for the selected parameters. For example, you can't retrieve the contact information of users in Office A with designation Developer because PowerShell doesn't allow data filtering based on the parameter Office.

On the other hand, in O365 Manager Plus, you have an exhaustive list of preconfigured reports that you can view in a single click. You can also pick out the data you want to view using built-in filters, and save the filter settings for future use. This way you won't have to apply the same filter setting every time you need to view similar data.

As you can see in the image above, you can easily apply any number of conditions in O365 Manager Plus.

Office 365 auditing

Most organizations audit Office 365 for better security and to ensure compliance requirements for regulatory mandates are met. Storing audit logs helps with forensic analysis; you can analyze past incidents to avoid similar threats in the future. But with the admin center and PowerShell scripts, it's not possible to retrieve audit logs older than 90 days. This, however, isn't ideal, as you need audit data at your disposal, and you need it to be easily accessible.

With the admin center and PowerShell scripts, you have to fetch audit logs from the log repository every single time you need some piece of information. This task quickly becomes time-consuming, especially if your audit log repository holds a significant number of records. The image below shows the Office 365 admin center's UI for fetching required audit data.

With O365 Manager Plus, you can create profiles to view the required audit data in a single click. All you have to do is create audit profiles with the data you want to view, and then sit back and let the product do its work. And the cherry on top—you can access historical audit data dating back to the moment you started using O365 Manager Plus. Some other key advantages include:

- **Real-time auditing:** Instead of gathering the associated data for audit reports each time, O365 Manager Plus keeps audit reports updated in real time.

- **Profile-based auditing:** Instead of having to peruse the entire list of audit reports to find the right one (as required in Office 365), O365 Manager Plus lets you create your own profiles so you can view only those audit details you need to see.

- **Group-based auditing:** While auditing Azure Active Directory, O365 Manager Plus lets you generate reports for user activity based on group membership. Native Office 365 is unable to audit based on group membership.

- **Advanced filtering:** In native Office 365, you can only filter audit logs based on certain attribute values. With O365 Manager Plus, you can filter your audit logs based on any attribute and perform multi-valued searches as needed.

- **Custom views:** While Office 365 doesn't support custom views, with O365 Manager Plus you can create your own custom views to see filtered data, summarized data, or summarized data that is filtered. [Learn more]

- **Business hours auditing:** Office 365 doesn't support restricted time frame auditing, but O365 Manager Plus lets you retrieve audit details based on business hours or a specific period of time.

- **Export data:** In native Office 365, you can only export data in CSV format. But in O365 Manager Plus, you can export audit data in multiple formats, including PDF, XLS, HTML, or CSV.

The image below shows the Activities by Mailbox Owners audit report. In the left pane, you can view some of the default audit reports provided by O365 Manager Plus.

Office 365 monitoring

You should always keep a close eye on Office 365 activity to identify any discrepancies in your working setup; this is especially true for identifying service outages. When it comes to service health monitoring, neither the Office 365 admin center nor PowerShell provide any real-time alerts. If you're using native tools, you have to keep an eye on the Service Health Dashboard (SHD) around the clock to learn about service incidents and advisories.

On the other hand, **O365 Manager Plus offers:**

- **A centralized console for monitoring:** With O365 Manager Plus, you won't have to switch between monitoring applications. You can monitor the health of Exchange Online, Azure Active Directory, OneDrive for Business, Skype for Business, and ten other Office 365 services all from one central location.

- **Feature and endpoint monitoring:** Monitor the health and performance of features and endpoints of all Office 365 services 24x7.

- **Real-time alerts:** Receive instant email notifications on service incidents, and cut out those constant visits to the SHD for updates.

- **Historical data:** Gain access to historical Office 365 service health monitoring data that's older than 30 days.

- **In-depth graphs:** View graphs illustrating the health status of Office 365 services to facilitate quick decision-making.

Office 365 management

In larger organizations, a significant number of employees can join the organization at any time. As an IT admin, it's your responsibility to create user accounts and assign required licenses for new employees. Although managing all these mailboxes, users, groups, and contacts in bulk would save you time, you can't perform bulk user management tasks like these in the Office 365 admin center, as shown in the image below.
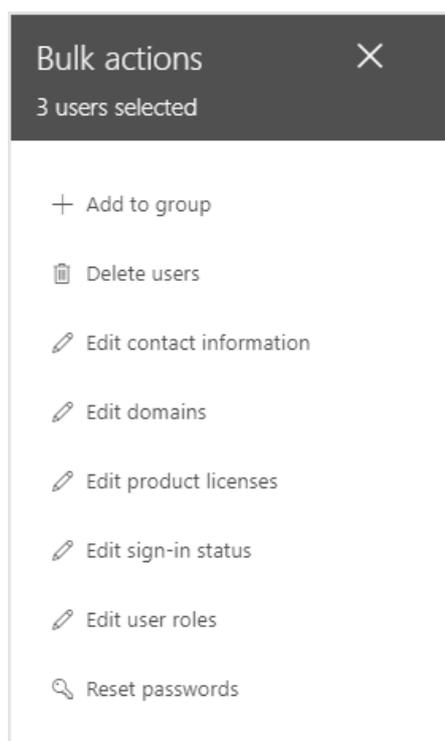
With limited management options in the admin center, you'd have to individually create the required number of user accounts, and then manually assign licenses to them.
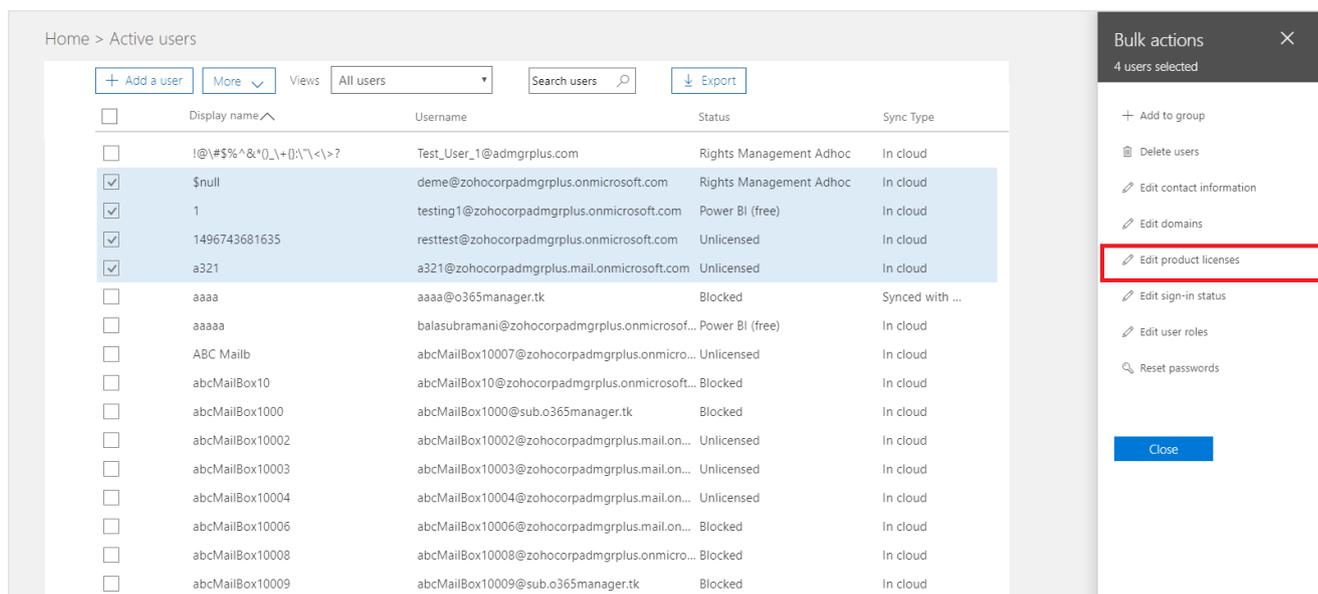
PowerShell scripts can handle bulk management tasks, but scripting only further complicates these tasks with painfully long scripts. Below is the script to create one hundred user accounts. The drawback of this script is entering the details for one hundred users manually; plus, you would have to write separate code to assign licenses for each new employee.

```
PS C:\> Connect-MsolService
>> for($i = 0 ;$i -lt 100; $i++)
>> {
>> $FirstName = Read-Host "FirstName"
>> $LastName = Read-Host "LastName"
>> $UserPrincipalName = Read-Host "UserPrincipalName"
>> $DisplayName = Read-Host "DisplayName"
>> $UsageLocation = Read-Host "UsageLocation"
>> $Office = Read-Host "Office"
>> $PhoneNumber = Read-Host "PhoneNumber"
>> $Title = Read-Host "Title"
>> $State = Read-Host "State"
>> $MobilePhone = Read-Host "MobilePhone"
>> $StreetAddress = Read-Host "StreetAddress"
>> $City = Read-Host "City"
>> $Country = Read-Host "Country"
>> $Department = Read-Host "Department"
>> $Fax = Read-Host "Fax"
>> $AlternateMobilePhones = Read-Host "AlternateMobilePhones"
>> $AlternateEmailAddresses = Read-Host "AlternateEmailAddresses"
>> $PostalCode = Read-Host "PostalCode"
>> $Password = Read-Host "Password" -AsSecureString
>> $PreferredLanguage = Read-Host "PreferredLanguage"
>> New-MsolUser
>> -FirstName $FirstName
>> -LastName $LastName
>> -UserPrincipalName $UserPrincipalName
>> -DisplayName $DisplayName
>> -UsageLocation $UsageLocation
>> -Office $Office
>> -PhoneNumber $PhoneNumber
>> -Title $Title
>> -State $State
>> -MobilePhone $MobilePhone
>> -StreetAddress $StreetAddress
>> -City $City
>> -Country $Country
>> -Department $Department
>> -Fax $Fax
>> -AlternateMobilePhone $AlternateMobilePhones
>> -AlternateEmailAddresses $AlternateEmailAddresses
>> -PostalCode $PostalCode
>> -Password $Password
>> -PreferredLanguage $PreferredLanguage
>>
>> }
```

O365 Manager Plus overcomes all these challenges with easy-to-use management features. With O365 Manager Plus, you can create multiple user accounts and assign licenses to them in a single click. All you have to do is to upload a CSV file with the user information.

You can also reuse the CSV file you used to create user accounts to perform other user management functions, like resetting user passwords, removing licenses, and locking accounts.

Office 365 alerting

Alerts on critical events help you quickly take action when an issue arises. Although the Office 365 admin center allows you to create alerts, it can't match O365 Manager Plus' impeccable customization features. The image below shows the features available to customize alerts in the Office 365 admin center.

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Summary

It's no doubt that the Office 365 admin center and PowerShell are powerful. But there is also no doubt that each are complex in their own way, and neither can fulfill all your management needs. On the other hand, O365 Manager Plus performs all the tasks that can be performed using the admin center or PowerShell and many more.

To use O365 Manager Plus, you don't need much technical expertise. Even with just basic technical knowledge, you can perform all your management tasks in just a few clicks. You can also create custom roles and delegate tasks to technicians to reduce your and other administrators' workload. It's up to you to choose the right tool for seamless Office 365 administration.

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