

MANAGING CONTENT SPRAWL IN MICROSOFT 365

Setting you up for success



Introduction

For many organisations, the rollout of Office 365, SharePoint and Microsoft Teams during the coronavirus pandemic has been a huge success, immediately engaging users and breathing life into collaboration and communication.

But as Microsoft 365 services adoption continues to rise, many organisations are faced with sprawl that becomes increasingly tough to manage. This includes rapidly growing amounts of inactive teams and groups, unused accounts belonging to external users, as well as difficulties trying to identify unknown publicly shared content. In an increasingly remote world, this problem is not limited to one solution but the entire Microsoft ecosystem.

Left unmanaged, sprawl can impact the user experience, make search difficult, and exasperate company content lifecycle plans, as well as security and compliance requirements. It reduces the effectiveness of these solutions and can bring a wide range of challenges. So how do you combat these problems?

In this guide we show you how to identify sprawl, manage clutter across your ecosystem and get you set up for success.

THIS GUIDE COVERS:

- › What is sprawl
- › Identifying sprawl in your organisation
- › Ways to declutter
- › Set up for success

What is sprawl?

Microsoft 365 has become the go-to cloud-based productivity and collaboration tool for organisations all around the world. Yet its success - due to its ease of use and familiarity, scope of use through its range of services, and scalability has led to an unwanted problem: sprawl.

Sprawl is the idea that the use of apps and services can multiply to the point where growth is out of control. An accumulation of both sprawl and other resources gather to create an abundance of clutter. The need to de-clutter is essential for organisations that want to reduce costs, increase productivity, and remain agile in an ever-changing world.

Without proper rules and governance, it is very easy for documents, SharePoint sites, Spreadsheets and Teams groups to grow and grow until it isn't clear what ones you should be using for what.



Identifying sprawl in your organisation

When deploying SharePoint, Microsoft Teams and OneDrive many organisations tend to leave the platforms wide open, allowing anyone to create sites, teams or channels.

Without specific guidance and training, there tends to be poor adherence to any formal information architecture (data classification, tagging, labeling, navigation). Modern collaboration includes both structured data (with clearly defined data types) and unstructured data (audio, video, chat, images).

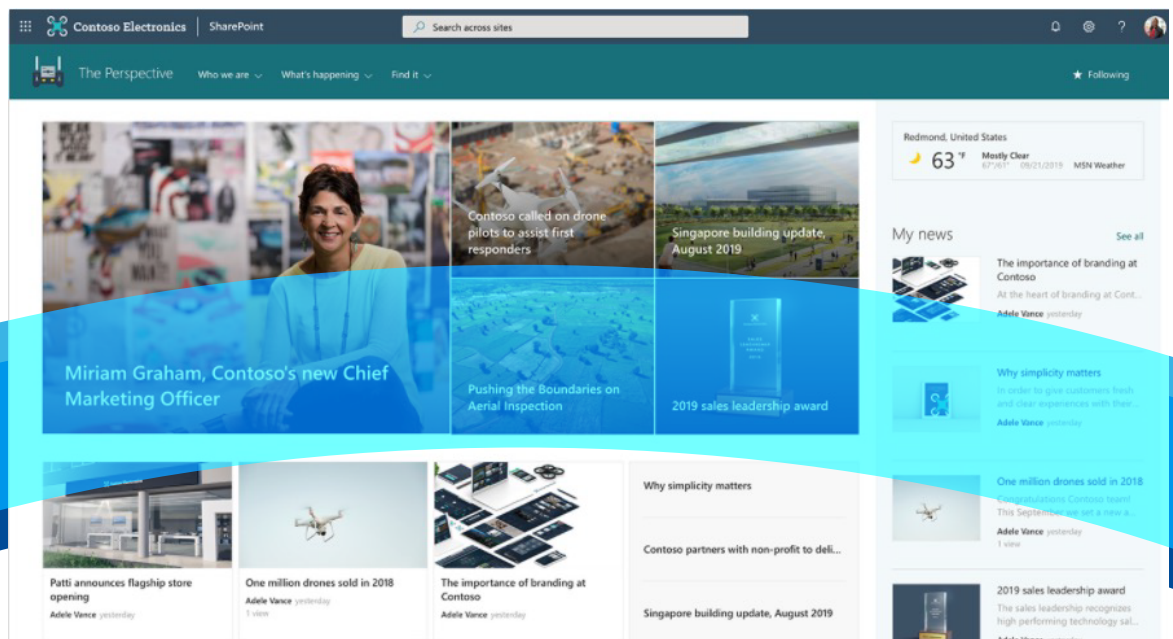
With the volume of unstructured data growing at an exponential rate as collaboration moves toward video and chat-based tools, you need to ensure governance and processes are in order to prevent issues down the line.

What does sprawl look like in M365?

SharePoint

Microsoft's market-leading content collaboration platform, SharePoint is a popular solution for building portals, intranets, and extranets – and is infamous for enabling sprawl. Here are just some of ways sprawl can get out of control in SharePoint:

- › Uncontrolled site creation – By default anyone can create a site usually without oversight, planning, or any kind of formal training. This can often result in dozens/hundreds of rarely used or abandoned sites. This can lead to a poorly performing search experience, and your intellectual property (content and conversations) spread across multiple locations each with a maze of chats, files, and channels.
- › Unused teams and SharePoint sites - As everyone can create sites, it is very common for users to create duplicate teams/sites that they use for a short while and then things in your organisation generally move on and the site is forgotten about.
- › No retirement policy? Many SharePoint sites get created to support a particular project or team, when the project has been completed the site should enter a reduced phase and at some point in the future be retired in general. Ensuring you have rules and processes in place to make this happen is key or every project ever run in your company will still have its own SharePoint site.



Teams

Microsoft Teams has seen a huge rise in users over the years and in the process the problem of sprawl has also increased. As Teams uses SharePoint for communication, businesses need to have their goals in line before rollout across the business.

Uncontrolled teams creation - As with SharePoint, by default anyone can create Teams and Channels and begin uploading content to its underlying SharePoint infrastructure. The chats and threaded discussions (within Channels) are captured and stored within the Exchange workload, and meeting recordings within Stream.

Unused assets - Additionally, creation of a new Team automatically creates an Office 365 Group, which is an Azure Active Directory security group, and includes the automatic provisioning of several digital assets, such as a SharePoint team site and an Exchange shared calendar. Whether or not these assets are used, they are created and available – and can rapidly expand the volume of content sprawl.

No retiral policy? Many Teams sites get created to support a particular project or team, when the project has been completed the site should enter a reduced phase and at some point, in the future be retired in general. Ensuring you have rules and processes in place to make this happen is key or every project ever run in your company will still have its own SharePoint site.



What are the long-term impacts of sprawl?

Here are just some of the impacts of sprawl if left unmanaged:

- › Lack of productivity - When your data is not optimised, classified and organised, it cannot be used effectively. This can greatly impact discovery as well as any updates in the future.
- › Security issues - Ensure you can measure your data properly as if you can't this can make it difficult for administrators to enforce company policies and procedures. This can open your company up to security and compliance risks. Mistakes in IP management (much less intentional mishandling) are often not found until after-the-fact, which can cause greater problems down the line.
- › Decreased business value - Prevent losing value when it comes to your data by making sure you can find it in a timely manner. What good is a system if you cannot find the right data at the right time? There is also the issue of relevance. The more sites you have the more difficult it is to find the relevant document and the one version of truth.
- › Cost – You do get a good allowance of storage with Microsoft 365 but once you pass a certain level the cost of this can add up while delivering very little value for your organisation.

In our experience very few organisations begin their planning process with sound governance policies in place. Instead, many begin to act when the issues start to cause real problems within the business. To prevent this from happening or getting worse we recommend you act now.



Poor
productivity



Security
Issues



Decreased
Business value



Cost

Ways to declutter?

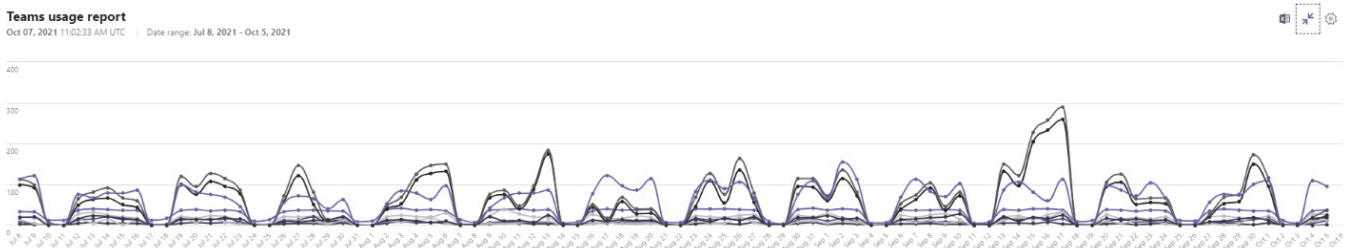
So, you have identified the problems, now when should you get governance in place? We say the earlier the better. As we've previously stated, few organisations have a handle on governance and content/data sprawl at the start of their M365 journey. The fact is that most organisations fail to act until pain is felt. This could be through a poor search and discovery experience, low engagement levels, or in some cases a security breach or compliance failure. Regardless of where you are today, it's never too late to get started with your planning process.

Analysis - First stage is to identify all out of date assets. The best way to start is to focus on Teams channels and SharePoint Sites.

For SharePoint Sites there is a range of analytics available to show you the trends of users, visitors and time on the page. This can give you a quick visual way of assessing each site and identifying when a site is no longer in use.

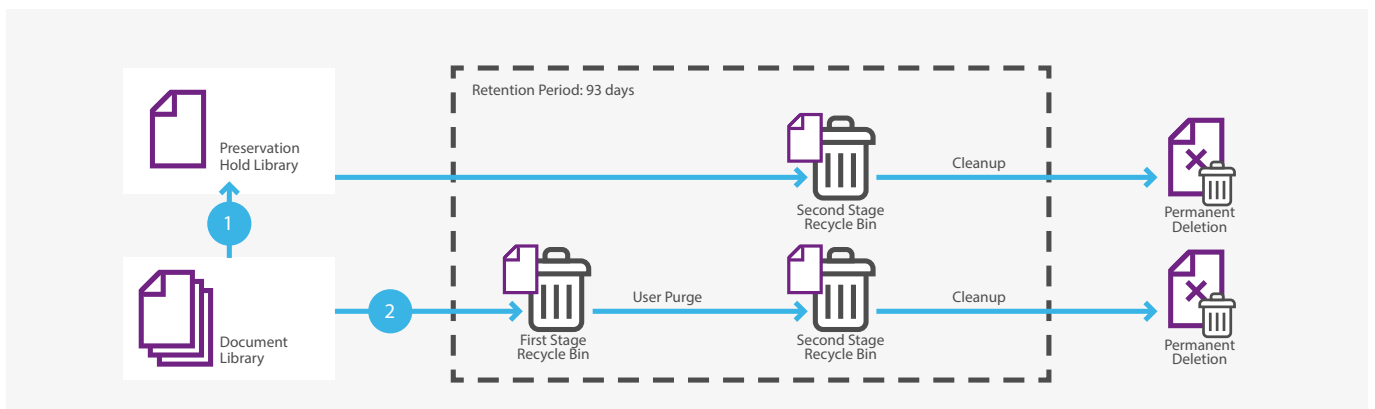
For Teams the Microsoft Teams admin centre provides a range of reports on Teams channels and usage over different time periods to help you easily identify channels that are ready to be decluttered.

A manual exercise that would also be helpful is to contact every site or channel owner and get them to confirm if it is still active and when they would expect it to be retired if at all. This will take time but can sometimes be a quick way of easily identifying quick wins.



Governance - who can create new Teams sites new SharePoint sites – process around site creation and ensuring they are consistent and clear ownership.

Retention and deletion policies - For example if your organisation should keep documents for 5 years you can define a retention policy at a SharePoint site or Teams Channel level to automatically do this for all documents within it. Ensuring a strategy for the end of the lifecycle of a team and how you get rid of them – retain or delete them when they aren't needed. Some you can't delete, for example financial information.



Where to start

Analysis

Out of date assets - The Teams usage report in the Microsoft Teams admin center gives you an overview of the usage activity in Teams, including the number of active users and channels, so you can quickly see how many users across your organisation are using Teams to communicate and collaborate. You can view usage information for teams, including the number of active users and channels, guests, and messages in each team.

SharePoint usage report - The SharePoint usage reports bring information regarding how a user interacts with the site. When you access these reports, you can get a clear idea about the usage count of the site per day or per month, popularity trends, popular items, and frequency of people clicking the recommended results.

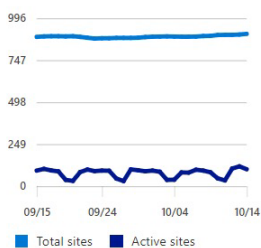
Usage > SharePoint

Activity **Site usage**

Last updated: October 14, 2020 (UTC)  Past 30 days 

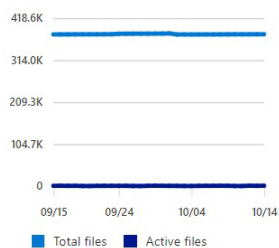
Sites

Number of total and active sites



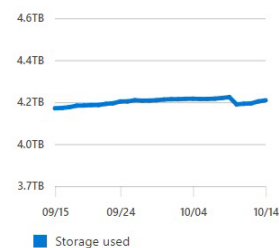
Files

Number of total and active files



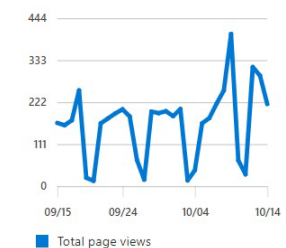
Storage

Amount of storage used



Pages

Number of page views



Governance

Begin with structuring your environments. This means defining and managing the provisioning process, including who can create a new site or group, what components they include (web parts, apps, tabs, etc.), and the templates used. It also means having naming conventions, and a good communication strategy so that employees understand how to utilise these tools within the guidelines established by IT.

What you can do

- › Get rules in place from the start - We understand this is easier said than done but the sooner you have this the better your processes will be in the long term.
- › Introduce an approach for new teams and groups/sites - You should decide what it is for, why you have it, how long you'll use it.
- › There are a number of different ways to achieve this including the use of MS forms SP lists or Power Apps/a power app.
- › Clear ownership – if you create a site or channel, you are responsible for its upkeep to confirm if it is still required or if it can be retired.



Retention and deletion

What are retention policies for Teams?

For most organisations, the volume and complexity of their data is increasing daily – email, documents, Teams messages, and more. To manage or govern this information it is important for admins to:

- › Comply proactively with industry regulations and internal policies that require organisations to retain content for a minimum period – for example, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act might require you to retain certain types of content for seven years.
- › Reduce their risk in the event of litigation or a security breach by permanently deleting old content that organizations are no longer required to keep.
- › Help organisations share knowledge effectively and be more agile by ensuring that their users work only with content that's current and relevant to them.

With a Teams retention policy, you can:

- › Decide proactively whether to retain content, delete content, or both – retain and then delete the content based on time.
- › Use the SCC Policy creation user experience or Teams Retention PowerShell cmdlets
- › Set different retention durations for Teams Chats v/s Teams Channel Messages.
- › Target the entire organisation with these location rows and target specific users [for Teams chat retention - and specific Teams - For Teams channel message retention]
- › Use retention policies with the SharePoint & OneDrive location rows to address the Files in Teams.

SharePoint retention labels

You can easily apply a retention label to a model in Microsoft SharePoint Syntex. You can do this for both document understanding and form processing models.

Retention labels let you apply retention settings to the documents that your models identify. For example, you want your model to not only identify any Insurance notice documents that are uploaded to your document library, but to also apply a business retention tag to them so that these documents cannot be deleted from the document library for the specified time period (the next five months, for example).

You can apply a pre-existing retention label to your model through your model settings on your model's home page.

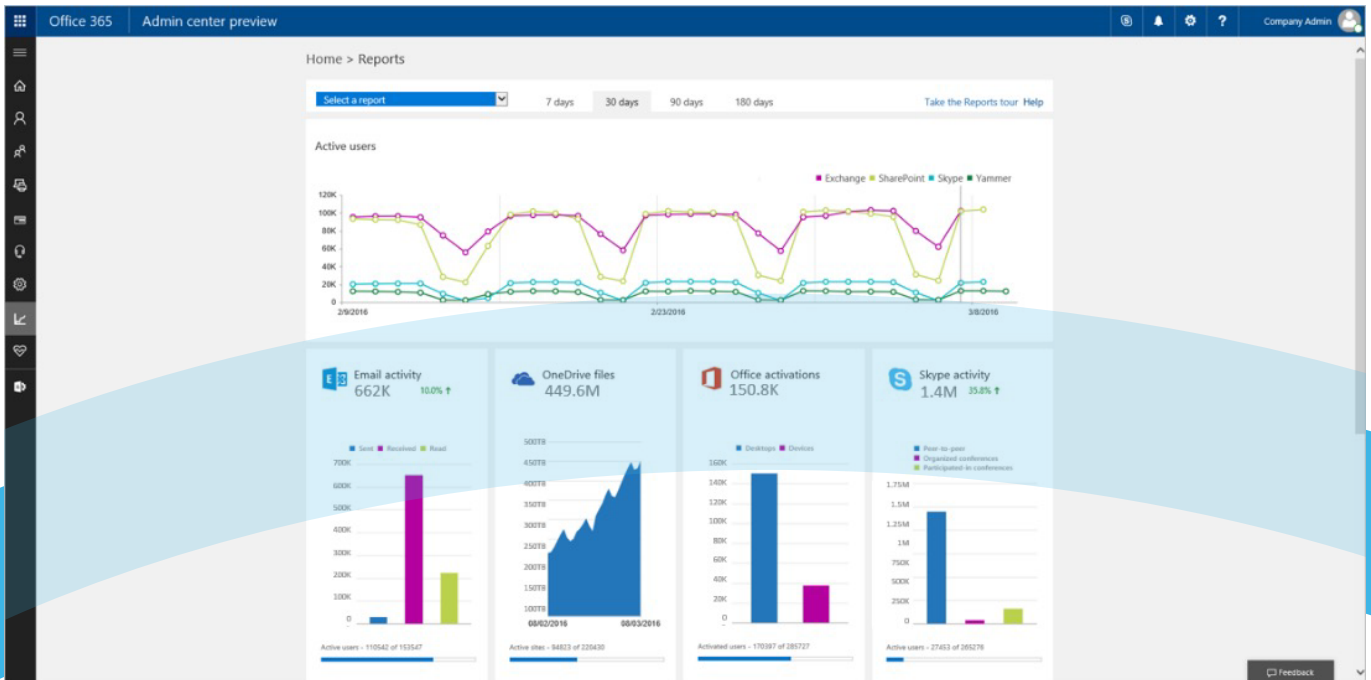
Setting up policies and notifying users

Focusing on communication and community management, this is the key to creating a healthy collaboration environment. Your focus should be on adoption of technology and employee engagement, tracking and measuring activities and communicating between leadership, management, IT, and employees about what is working – and what is not working within the environment. Proactive administration includes sharing best practices, constantly learning, and iterating your plans and governance strategies.

Ongoing Management is concerned with the mechanics of maintaining your security, compliance, and governance standards, including retention policies (archiving, deletion), feature updates (timing, training), site/team expiration policies, app/webpart approvals, and other business-critical oversight capabilities.

What you can do

- › Scripts - Use scripts to automate the checking and updating of retention policies across your estate.
- › Reports - Reports can identify areas of focus/sprawl to fix and scripts can be used to automatically make changes/deletion etc saving hours of time
- › Dashboards and admin centres - use dashboards and admin centres to monitor behaviour across the organisations



- › Retire documents, Teams sites and SharePoint sites and pages using retention policies and analytics to identify.
- › Review costs - Each tenant has a good storage allowance. SharePoint has over 1 terabyte of data. Teams on the other hand is saved on SharePoint which can be expensive. Teams uses SharePoint as a document sharing and file storage. You can archive old files to save on costs too. You can archive them to Azure Archive or Azure blob storage.
- › Prevent data loss – security is a huge topic for all organisations these days and with cybercrime on the rise you want to ensure you are protected from every angle. With a data loss prevention (DLP) policy you can identify, monitor, and automatically protect sensitive information across your site collections.

Set up for success



How do organisations overcome the governance challenges outlined above?

There are five things you can do that will have an immediate impact on your governance planning efforts:

Have a governance board in place

Ensure you create a board including management, IT and business users which allows for open discussion and decisions. This will help to create a shared understanding of your business goals and procedures across the different departments.

Boost communication

Make sure that your activities, tasks and decision-making processes are clear for your stakeholders and employees across the business. It is important that everyone involved knows they are able to give actionable input and insights.

Reporting

Reporting and analytics are key enablers for governing sprawl. You need to be able to clearly identify instances of sprawl and remove it.

Automation

Creating a framework and a set of rules that you can automatically apply to your digital estate to manage the sprawl is key. Retention policies with some additional help from scripting will help to automate this process in an easy to use and always on way.

Launch and continue to update

The best place to start is to pilot first. From this you can take what you learn and iterate on your plan and pilot again. Don't be afraid to slow down and build upon your successes. Even some of the most meticulously planned projects can fall victim to content sprawl. However, using a holistic approach that includes all of the points above will give you a good base for governance planning which will help you keep on top of sprawl within your organisation.

How others are approaching governance



As part of their efforts to modernise business processes, the ACCA required an introduction and rollout of SharePoint, Teams, Power Platform and some of the wider Office 365 workloads to their organisation. The team were rolling out a new suite of technology and needed help to ensure adoption of the new tech. They also wanted to ensure they had the correct control framework in place and had to make sure that their data was secure in the cloud.

In addition, they were also looking to set up an operating model for delivery of changes and for this to encompass upskilling of their existing IT staff.

Working closely with the internal management team, we implemented the following solutions to help meet the ACCA's objectives.

Governance model for SharePoint and Teams - The Governance model detailed the recommended setup of SharePoint & Teams within ACCA. It provided detail around the way SharePoint & Teams should be set up for use, how the platform should be governed and used and what policies and procedures should be in place with regards user access, naming conventions, external sharing etc.

Need help with managing
sprawl in your organisation?

Microsoft 365 Governance - Briefing

To learn more about how Bridgeall can help your organisation declutter and manage content sprawl, get in touch with our team. As Microsoft Gold Partners, our team of experts will support and guide you through your governance journey, handling the process from start to finish.

Find out more with our Microsoft 365 briefing:

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



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