



eFolder White Paper: 5 Aspects of a File Sync Solution that Make It Business-Grade

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Introduction

Examples of Consumer-Grade File Sync

- Dropbox
- Google Drive
- Microsoft OneDrive
- Apple iCloud
- SugarSync

Market segmentation is a common phenomenon in nearly every industry. One portion of the market gravitates toward one or more solutions that meet a certain collection of requirements, while other portions of the market that demand a different set of requirements may opt for other solutions, recognizing that they have unique needs. For example, most car buyers choose to drive regular sedans, but those who know that they need greater towing capacity or more seating capacity may opt for a pickup truck or minivan.

Market segmentation also applies to the file sync and share market. Most consumers use a consumer-grade file sync service—logically so, since their needs do not usually extend beyond simple file sharing and syncing of ordinary documents and images. Yet despite there being a clear difference between the needs of “casual” users and working professionals, particularly in the realms of security and collaboration, a substantial number of businesspeople still choose to use a consumer-grade file sync service. Why? The fact is: many people do not understand the key differences between file sync services built for everyday consumers and file sync solutions built with the needs of businesses in mind.

This white paper is intended to help end users and IT providers understand the key differences between consumer-grade file sync and business-grade file sync. After reading this white paper, users should gain an understanding of which segment of the file sync market they should gravitate toward, based on their needs and the needs of their organizations. While a comprehensive analysis of all the differences between consumer-grade file sync and business-grade file sync is beyond the scope of this white paper, this white paper does examine five features that distinguish a business-grade file sync service.

1. Compliant with industry regulations and other legal requirements

When people use consumer-grade file sync services for everyday activities, such as syncing and storing family pictures or homework assignments on different devices, regulatory requirements such as HIPAA, GLBA, and SOX obviously don’t come into the picture. The same cannot be said for business users. These and other legal and compliance requirements matter greatly for organizations in a variety

of industries, such as healthcare and finance. Companies, for instance, that deal in any capacity with electronic Protected Health Information (ePHI) must ensure that the services they use comply fully with HIPAA.

For this reason, employees using file sync and share in a professional environment must ensure that the service they use complies fully with the rules and regulations that apply to their business. Using a business-grade file sync solution that meets these requirements is the only way to ensure regulatory compliance, because consumer-grade file sync services simply are not up to par.

Of course, simply because a particular file sync service has more features than popular consumer-grade services does not mean it is suitable for companies with sensitive information. As an example, even though Dropbox for Business is purportedly suitable for use in the workplace, it is not HIPAA-compliant and therefore should not be used by any companies even remotely connected to the healthcare field. Business owners must therefore tread carefully and ensure they choose a truly business-grade file sync solution — one that complies fully with important laws and regulatory standards.

2. Offers complete control over file revisions, backup, and data retention

No matter what industry a company operates in, one of the most critical considerations every business owner must take into account is the security and retention of company data. After all, given the increased reliance on computers to get work done, the ability to recover older versions of files that have been accidentally deleted has never been of greater importance. When analyzing which file sync and share solution to choose, therefore, organizations must carefully consider how different services back up and restore important data.

Consumer-grade file sync services fare poorly in this regard. The notion of data backup doesn't really exist in the consumer file sync arena; these services do not retain deleted data or old revisions of files for a long time, making them extremely problematic for organizations that ever need to be able to recover older data. Additionally, with consumer-grade file sync, files stored outside of the specified synced folder cannot be backed up to a cloud server, a useful feature for those who may not back up their data regularly (e.g., road warriors).

Organizations who consider data retention and backup to be an important priority need to consider the rich features enabled by a business-grade file sync solution. One of the most important aspects of business-grade file sync is ensuring that administrators and users have complete control over where and how their data is kept, including previous versions of their synced files and backups of files stored elsewhere on a computer. Business-grade file sync allows for users to store and revert back to an unlimited number of previous file versions. Additionally, deleted files can be retained indefinitely (or for a specific period of time) and recovered with a single click, ensuring any accidental or malicious deletions or overwrites are not permanent. In short, business-grade file sync solutions let administrators rest assured that the retention of users' critical files is never an issue.

3. Compatible with existing client hardware

Bringing a new technology solution into an organization, no matter the type of solution or its complexity, often requires companies to invest in additional training and/or infrastructure. From a time and cost perspective, the solution that causes the least disruption while still meeting the organization's needs is the superior choice. Of course, maintaining a long-term perspective matters greatly, but organizations must also consider the short-term upheaval involved with bringing new technology into the workplace. For example, implementing a new billing system in a large company should optimally take place in phases, rather than all at once, to minimize disruption and chances for error.

When it comes to adopting a file sync solution, then, organizations should keep in mind the short-term costs of introducing a new way to share information across multiple teams and devices. One way to minimize confusion and ease the transition to a new file sync solution is to deploy one that is compatible with existing hardware and workflows. The hardware and workflow in question here — beyond individual users' computers and devices — is the file server present in countless offices.

File servers serve a variety of useful functions. They centralize data from different users and devices in a single repository, which reduces the risk of data leakage because users can easily access data from a single location. File servers also decrease the potential for data loss, since backing up a single server with a backup and disaster recovery solution is easily achievable. Businesses that implement a file sync solution and that already have a file system in place would benefit from keeping their file server intact, but still need a way to empower remote users to access files on the server without having to use VPN or FTP.

While consumer-grade file sync solutions — and many file sync services geared toward businesses — encourage users to simply “rip and replace” their file servers and move everything to the cloud, this may not be an ideal solution for all businesses. Rather than completely throwing out their file servers, organizations should consider adopting a business-grade file sync solution that is compatible with the file server they already have in place. Cloud-enabling the file server by installing a sync agent onto it allows remote users to access the server’s contents easily, without using VPN or FTP, even while the server continues to function as a central hub for an organization’s data.

In essence, adopting a business-grade file sync solution with the ability to cloud-enable the file server gives organizations the best of both worlds: they gain all the capabilities of cloud file sync, while maintaining a local copy of their data.

4. Advanced collaboration and sharing features

Consumers who sign up for a free file sync service largely have the expectation that file sync will help them replace flash drives and email for simple file transfers. However, businesses that invest in a file sync solution have expectations regarding collaboration and security that go far beyond what consumer-grade file sync services provide.

Business-grade file sync can fundamentally transform how colleagues collaborate. Shared folders allow employees to work together on a common set of files that multiple people need access to. A twelve-person marketing team, for instance, may all share a single folder that contains a wide variety of marketing collateral, both drafted and finalized. Once a piece of collateral has been approved by management for wider distribution, it may be copied into another shared folder accessible by all salespeople. Though most business-

grade file sync solutions sport this capability, most consumer-grade file sync services were never meant for use by a large team sharing a set of files amongst each other.

Secure forms of sharing are another standout feature of business-grade file sync. Every free file sync service allows users to generate a link to download a synced file and paste that link into an email or IM. Unfortunately, these free services do not permit users to place any kind of security measures on those share links, so anyone who finds and clicks on a share link — regardless of how old the link is or the sensitivity of the shared file in question — can gain access to the file. On the other hand, business-grade file sync services allow users to configure granular security features, such as expiration dates and download limits, on individual share links. Users of a business-grade file sync solution can also restrict who can actually download a shared file by forcing recipients to log in with email and password credentials.

Only true business-grade file sync solutions provide organizations with significant advances in productivity, collaboration, and security.

5. Provides IT with visibility and control

An unmanaged file sync service being used to share and sync corporate data is a recipe for disaster. Consumer-grade file sync services do not provide administrators with the ability to view and control how employees interact with and share company files. As a result, employees who choose to use free, unmonitored file sync services to sync data between multiple computers or to share files with people outside the company could put an organization in jeopardy. The importance of a fully managed and monitored file sync solution to protect against data leakage or other security risks cannot be overstated.

Business-grade file sync solutions provide IT administrators with the visibility and control they need to ensure the protection of clients' data. Especially in a collaborative environment, the sudden disappearance of files due to accidental deletion or the malicious actions of an employee gone rogue can wreak considerable havoc. Fortunately, business-grade file sync solutions guard against these types of disasters by providing administrators with an activity log showing the time, date, and user associated with any action, such as a file deletion or move.

Additional features such as remote wipe provide administrators with the tools they need to ensure data security. If an employee loses his or her laptop or gets terminated, the organization's administrator can instantly wipe the device clean of synced corporate content. Furthermore, custom audit logs provide administrators with a complete review of all of the file sharing and syncing activities within an organization, making it easy to track and put an end to potential security issues. None of these capabilities are possible with consumer-grade file sync.

Conclusion

As mobile devices and the BYOD (bring your own device) trend gained significant traction, free file sync services emerged and quickly gained popularity among consumers. The fact that file sync emerged from the consumer end of the technological spectrum presents a conundrum to many companies who are intrigued by the possibility of increasing employee productivity but are also concerned about the safety and security of their data.

Fortunately for IT providers, the gulf between free file sync services and business-grade file sync solutions is vast — not only in terms of security, but also in terms of the features employees enjoy. Promoting the differences between consumer-grade and business-grade file sync is key to ensuring employees understand the need for business-grade file sync in the workplace.

IT solution providers who want to provide their clients with a business-grade file sync solution need look no further than eFolder Anchor. Anchor is a secure and robust file sync solution built specifically for deployment by managed service providers and value-added resellers to SMB clients. With its combination of business- and administrator-friendly features, Anchor sets the gold standard for business-grade file sync that promotes employee productivity and MSP success. Resellers interested in learning more about Anchor can visit eFolder's website, at www.efolder.net.



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