
Migration Tools: Comparing Free v. Paid Solutions

Introduction

The road to the cloud consists of two well-traveled paths: First-party migration tools from the public cloud providers themselves, or third-party solutions such as BitTitan MigrationWiz®.

Once businesses have made the decision to migrate, IT professionals at managed service providers and internal IT departments need to choose one of these two paths. Some of the most common questions we've encountered during our decade in the migration business are about the advantages and drawbacks of the two approaches. They're good questions, with a common theme: Why pay for a tool to move users and data when free alternatives exist?

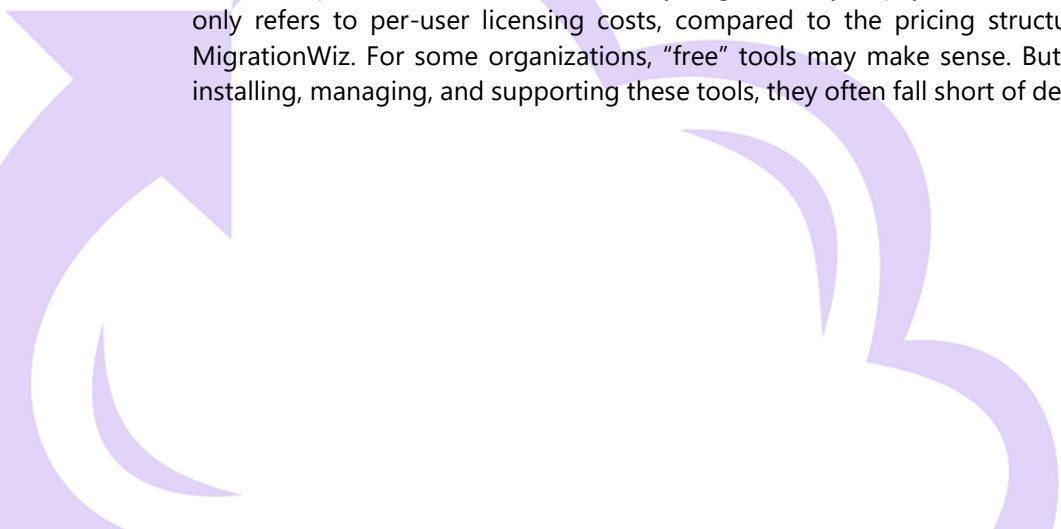
Let's examine the basic properties of free migration tools available from both Microsoft and Google. We'll begin with a general overview, take a look at tools you may already be evaluating, then compare what you get with MigrationWiz.

Free Tools: Background and Benefits

For obvious reasons, Google and Microsoft have an incentive to remove barriers to cloud office adoption. Once the initial hurdles of budget and executive buy-in are cleared, the physical migration of users and data is often the biggest challenge. These are technical, complex projects, with high costs of failure; key among those costs are downtime and lost data.

Both Microsoft and Google have developed tools and programs to make migrating to their platforms easier. For some organizations, these tools may offer a slightly better alternative to a fully manual migration. Most tools can handle the basic components of a mailbox, including mail items, calendars, contacts, etc. Some tools may be able to scale up and handle migrations in the 100 or 200-seat range. These offerings target the most common migration scenarios such as direct moves between Gmail and Exchange or even between Office 365 tenants, meaning they're an option for a large chunk of migration projects. But let's not overlook the real reason these tools are in the conversation: they're "free."

It's at this point where the old mantra "you get what you pay for" comes into play. "Free" in this context only refers to per-user licensing costs, compared to the pricing structure of third-party solutions like MigrationWiz. For some organizations, "free" tools may make sense. But when you factor in the cost of installing, managing, and supporting these tools, they often fall short of delivering a cost-effective solution.



Gaps in First-Party Migration Tools

Here's a general overview of common drawbacks in first-party solutions. For information about specific tools, see [APPENDIX](#).

Performance

Performance for any migration project starts with speed. How fast can you get your users and data moved to the Destination? Migration speed is affected by a variety of factors such as type and amount of data, available bandwidth, throttling, Source environment, and more.

When compared to tools from both Microsoft and Google, we see better data migration speeds from third-party solutions such as MigrationWiz. Free tools may offer an option for small, simpler migration projects. But they rarely scale to handle user counts in the thousands; nor can they migrate as many users concurrently. This needs to be a top consideration when your plan is to cut all users over in a weekend and avoid downtime on Monday.

Speed also comes into play during the pre-migration phase, where configuration and planning are key to a successful cutover. Free migration tools are designed for narrowly prescribed scenarios with fairly restrictive sets of supported dependencies and requirements. On-site server software, additional server configurations, and costly certificates are often required. The free tools offered by Microsoft or Google may work if you have the resources to plan, configure, and test your own migration and have the server hardware and software that often needs to be installed. You'll soon discover, however, that the cost of "free" migration tools is spent on support items like software licensing, hardware, and engineering costs.

We recommend conducting a proof-of-concept with a small number of users to test the performance and configuration time necessary to complete your migration. This enables your team to better understand the process while determining whether a first- or third-party solution is the correct path.

Control and Visibility

Depending on the tool, many first-party solutions offer limited customization and reporting options. One common example is support for a pre-stage migration approach. Pre-staging mailboxes is the most frequent strategy we see and recommend. This involves migrating the majority of user data in the background prior to the MX record cutover. This reduces the amount of data and bandwidth required during the time of cutover and enables larger projects to be executed in shorter windows of time. Some first-party tools do not support this approach, limiting their scalability.

In other cases, tools may not provide the same live, granular reporting on project status and errors that third-party solutions can provide. Migrations are bound to throw errors. Understanding where those items occur – down to the individual item level – helps IT troubleshoot and guide migrations along. This capability becomes even more important when dealing with high user counts or high-compliance environments. Migration project managers shouldn't have to dig for critical data.

There's little to no visibility built into a program like Microsoft FastTrack. Some businesses may like the hands-off approach of providing users and credentials to Microsoft and working within a general timeframe in which they would like to be migrated. For most IT professionals, however, this "black-box" approach leaves end users and management in the dark regarding the status of the migration. Third-party tools provide much more control and visibility over the entire project.

Support

Even with the most successful projects, something is bound to go wrong. For example, when an item doesn't migrate and logs an error, a password was entered incorrectly, or a Source endpoint is misconfigured. Errors happen, but they don't have to mean disaster. Most are a quick fix, but you need to have accessible and helpful support for when things do go off the rails.

Engaging with first-party solutions means you're relying on large vendors for support with your specific migration project; you're unlikely to be a top priority for them. Online documentation and training materials are often limited, too. SLAs for free tools tend to be longer or nonexistent – a "we'll get to you when we can" approach. That's not what you want to hear when your migration is timed out on a Sunday night.

While there are benefits to first-party solutions, there are also pitfalls that could end up costing you more money than low licensing costs from third-party solutions. Let's look now at the benefits of third-party tools and how they help you recover and return your up-front investment over the course of a project.

The MigrationWiz Difference: Benefits of First-Party Tools

Where free tools fall short – speed, control, and support – MigrationWiz excels.

Unlike first-party alternatives, solutions like MigrationWiz continually undergo feature and performance upgrades, making them faster and more scalable for a wider range of projects. The SaaS nature of MigrationWiz enables it to automatically scale up or down depending on project size. The tool should never be the bottleneck for your migration project. MigrationWiz is able to migrate several hundred users concurrently. We're able to reach higher data transfer speeds than first-party tools by leveraging the best available APIs from Google and Microsoft. The result? Your project is completed faster.

Besides data transfer speed, SaaS-based solutions also avoid time and complexity in the pre-migration phase. All the installation and configuration needs of the free tools simply don't exist with MigrationWiz, which is run entirely from your web browser and simply needs endpoint credentials to connect to your Source and Destination environments. Consider how much time your engineers will spend with free solutions – or on-prem third-party tools – in the configuration phase. All of this time and additional work will erode the margins you look to preserve by going with a free tool.

Control is another key benefit. Unlike the first-party tools, MigrationWiz offers far more granular control over your migration; support for different migration strategies; and visibility into progress and errors. Advanced Options enable you to customize nearly every aspect of your project if desired, including Date Range filtering; recipient mapping; error thresholds; and automated end user notifications. You can even specify which regional datacenter you would like to process your migration. For heavy PowerShell users, the BitTitan SDK offers a unique way to script nearly every aspect of your project, which comes in handy for large enterprise engagements where repetitive work can be automated to save time.

For a migration already in progress, MigrationWiz logs every item migrated and provides detailed information about the status of the overall project, migration speeds, and error messages. There's no guessing; no "black-box" feel. Just a clear view of your entire migration.

If our reporting dashboards indicate something is amiss, BitTitan support is there to help. Every license comes with 24/7 dedicated support included, whether it's a five-user project or 50,000. Premium and enterprise support packages are available for larger customers, in addition to onboarding for small projects or first-time users. The BitTitan Help Center features hundreds of in-depth articles and guides to cover every aspect of your project.

These costs are baked into the price of our licensing, meaning you don't have to pay extra for support. While it may seem like first-party solutions are a quick way to save money, access to support and documentation can reduce the overall cost of the project when you're able to avoid errors or quickly address them to keep the project on track.

Pick the Solution That's Right For Your Project

We're obviously biased in our conclusion. Microsoft and Google tools do offer a minimum viable product for some scenarios. If that works for your project, best of luck!

Yet life is a journey of tradeoffs. When you're evaluating first and third-party solutions, your initial focus will be on the up-front licensing cost. One business may look at the cost of MigrationWiz and see a margin-trimming expense and try to avoid it with a "free" tool from Microsoft or Google. Others see what over 36,000 customers have discovered since 2009: Engaging with BitTitan and paying a small amount per user for the performance and support of MigrationWiz, enables them to be more efficient and consistent in their transition to the cloud while eliminating project risk. The surest way to profitability comes from avoiding errors and limiting the amount of high-tier IT resources dedicated to configuring and managing projects. MigrationWiz helps you with both.

Have questions about free versus paid solutions? We'd be happy to help. [Drop us a line](#) or learn more at www.bittitan.com.

APPENDIX

This section provides an overview of specific first-party solutions available to customers. While this information will be periodically updated, the most current information and guidance about Microsoft and Google solutions will be in their respective help centers. Observations regarding the products below are based on our analysis of documentation, internal testing, and feedback from our global partner base.

Vendor: Microsoft

Scenario: Exchange to Office 365 (Cutover or Staged)

Advantages: Cost-effective method for very small migration projects off of on-premises Exchange servers and into Office 365; may be an option for those not eligible for FastTrack program.

Disadvantages: Unable to scale past a couple hundred users; heavily manual process completed via Exchange Admin Center (EAC) and PowerShell scripting.

[Link to documentation](#)

Vendor: Microsoft

Scenario: Exchange to Office 365 (Hybrid)

Advantages: One of the most common ways to migrate from Exchange Server to Office 365; strategy scales to support moving larger seat counts over period of time; once configured, good coexistence between environments; look and feel of single Exchange environment

Disadvantages: Hybrid deployments take additional time to configure; need for PowerShell scripts to support migration outside of capabilities in the EAC; limited batch management features; may be difficult to turn over to end user for longer term management.

[Link to documentation](#)

Note: In Q2 2020, BitTitan is releasing new Hybrid Exchange Management capabilities to MigrationWiz that support hybrid migrations while still leveraging Mailbox Replication Service (MRS). MigrationWiz offers a more automated process for discovering and adding users to projects; more robust batch management capabilities; and granular reporting and monitoring features.

Vendor: Microsoft

Scenario: Office 365 Tenant-to-Tenant Tool

Advantages: Once configured, good migration speeds via MRS; supports migration management from both Source and Destination; option for seasoned PowerShell professionals.

Disadvantages: Mail-only, meaning it will not address other components in a T2T migration such as OneDrive, SharePoint, or Teams; currently in beta; no user interface, managed mostly via cmdlets; lack of reporting, monitoring features; per Microsoft, only recommended for projects with less than 500 users.

[Link to documentation](#)

Vendor: Microsoft

Scenario: G Suite to Office 365

Advantages: Supports staged and cutover approach; decent documentation from Microsoft.

Disadvantages: Mail-only; does not support data within Google Drive, Google Team Drive, or Google Vault; lengthy manual configuration steps makes this difficult to scale in a large migration project.

[Link to documentation](#)

Vendor: Microsoft (FastTrack)

Scenario: Net-New Office 365 Customers from range of Sources

About: Unlike many of the solutions in this white paper that are migration tools, FastTrack is a program from Microsoft to help customers adopt Office 365.

Advantages: For qualifying customers, a hands-off approach to moving to the cloud; experts from Microsoft or trusted partners perform the migration.

Disadvantages: It's hands-off; limited ability to control timing and method of the migration, or visibility into progress, which can also complicate communication to end users; many customers will simply not qualify for FastTrack benefits; extensive work must still be performed by end user or partner to prepare the migration; any issues with that configuration or migration are quickly thrown back to the partner; read

documentation carefully before engaging to ensure you understand your responsibilities prior to the migration.

[Link to documentation](#)

Vendor: Google (G Suite Migrate, formerly AppBridge)

Scenario: Support for Exchange Server 2007+, Exchange Online, SharePoint Server 2007+, SharePoint Online, OneDrive, and File Shares to Gmail, Google Drive, and Google Team Drive

Advantages: Single UI to launch, manage multiple projects or batches; item logging; more scalable once solution is properly configured.

Disadvantages: Significant configuration and deployment needs in the local environment; developed specifically for larger projects, not applicable for SMB or midmarket customers; does not support IMAP, PSTs, or G Suite-to-G Suite scenarios.

[Link to documentation](#)

Vendor: Google (G Suite Migration for Exchange, GSMME)

Scenario: Exchange Server 2007+, Novell GroupWise, IMAP

Advantages: Basic email migration and supported components like mail items, calendars, and contacts. Better fit for mail-only SMB migrations than the G Suite Migrate tool.

Disadvantages: Still requires lengthy on-prem set up; customers report slow migration speeds; does not address other workloads besides mail.

[Link to documentation](#)

About BitTitan®

[BitTitan](#)® empowers IT service professionals to successfully deploy and manage cloud technologies through automation. [MigrationWiz](#)® is the industry-leading SaaS solution for mailbox, document and public folder migrations between a wide range of Sources and Destinations. Since 2009, BitTitan has moved over 19 million users to the cloud for 43,000 customers in 187 countries and supports leading cloud ecosystems including Microsoft, Amazon, Google and Dropbox. The global company has offices in Seattle and Singapore. To learn more, visit www.BitTitan.com.