The Cloud9 Guide to M365 Licencing and Security Optimisation

Executive Summary

In today's digital-first business environment, Microsoft 365 has become mission-critical infrastructure for UK SMEs. However, research indicates that organisations often overspend on licensing while operating with unnecessary security vulnerabilities. IT leaders face a perfect storm: complex licencing structures drain budgets, security gaps create risk, and stretched IT teams struggle to maintain control.

A study by CoreView found that 90% of organisations had gaps in essential security protections within their Microsoft 365 configurations. Additionally, Microsoft's licensing changes have led to price increases for various Microsoft 365 subscriptions, impacting budgets for many SMEs.

This comprehensive guide, developed by Cloud9's Microsoft Cloud security specialists, provides technology leaders with a clear path through the complexity. Drawing from hundreds of successful implementations across UK SMEs, we demonstrate how organisations can optimise their M365 investment, enhance their security posture, and transform IT from a cost centre into a strategic enabler.

Through practical insights and actionable recommendations, we show how true M365 optimisation can deliver:

• Immediate cost savings through right-sized licencing
• Enhanced security through automated monitoring and controls
• Increased IT team productivity through reduced manual oversight
• Improved compliance with UK regulatory requirements
• Clear visibility across your entire M365 estate

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Meet Our Technology Leaders

Throughout this whitepaper, we'll follow the journeys of two technology leaders who represent common scenarios in UK SMEs. Their experiences and challenges might mirror your own, and their successes can light the way forward for your organisation.

Alex Hamon - Chief Technology Officer

As CTO of a growing UK manufacturing firm with 250 employees, Alex embodies the challenges faced by technology leaders in mid-sized businesses. With over 20 years of experience in IT, Alex must balance strategic vision with hands-on implementation in an organisation where resources are finite, and demands are ever-increasing.

Alex's primary challenges include:

• Maximising the impact of technology investments with lean resources
• Ensuring security and compliance while enabling innovation
• Managing a smaller IT department (10 people) with a hands-on approach
• Driving significant technological advancements within tight budget constraints

"The pressure to drive innovation while maintaining security and controlling costs is constant. Every technology decision has to deliver maximum value but finding the time to optimise our systems when we're constantly firefighting is a real challenge."

Tim Smith - IT Manager

Tim manages IT operations for a UK financial services firm with 150 employees. With 10 years of progressive experience, Tim represents the technical leaders who must balance day-to-day operations with ensuring compliance with stringent UK-specific regulations.

Tim's key concerns include:

• Keeping pace with rapid technological changes and cybersecurity threats
• Operating within the constraints of a limited budget
• Ensuring compliance with GDPR and other UK regulations
• Managing team stress levels and preventing knowledge loss

"Every morning, I check our Microsoft Secure Score and wonder what security gaps I might have missed. Between maintaining systems, supporting users, and trying to implement new security measures, it feels like there aren't enough hours in the day."

Throughout this guide, we'll explore how both Alex and Tim tackle common M365 challenges and transform their organisations' approach to cloud security and licence management. Their journeys illustrate the practical application of the strategies and solutions we'll discuss, providing real-world context for your own M365 optimisation journey.

As you read their stories, you'll likely recognise similar challenges in your own organisation. Whether you're in Alex's position of strategic leadership or Tim's role of hands-on management, this guide will provide practical insights and solutions to help you navigate your M365 environment more effectively.

Section 1:
The M365 Challenge

The digital workplace has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years, with Microsoft 365 emerging as the backbone of modern business operations. For technology leaders like Alex and Tim, this transformation brings both opportunities and significant challenges.

"I think we've had a breach..." These words from Tim encapsulate the growing anxiety many IT leaders face. Meanwhile, Alex's discovery that his organisation was overspending on licensing by 30% while still having security gaps highlights another common predicament. These scenarios are not isolated incidents but symptoms of a perfect storm brewing in M365 management.
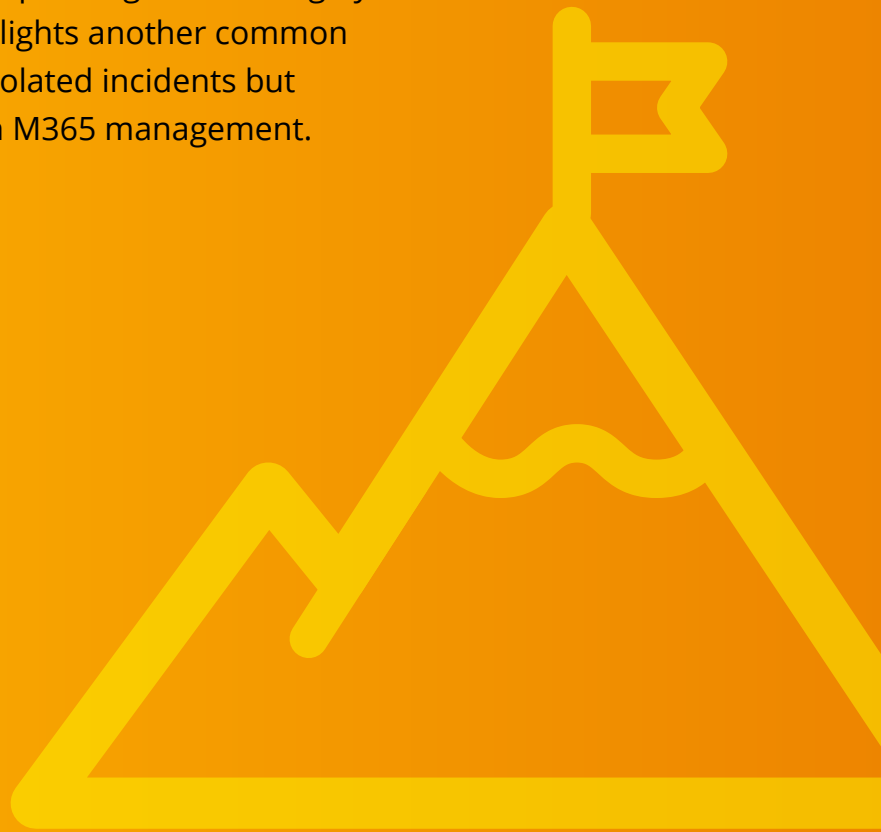
The Hidden Costs of Inaction

The financial impact of suboptimal M365 management extends far beyond visible licensing costs. Our comprehensive study of UK SMEs reveals the true cost of maintaining the status quo.

The direct financial impact is substantial, with organisations typically overspending by 30% on Microsoft 365 licensing alone. However, the indirect costs are often more significant. Misconfigurations in Microsoft 365 services have been identified as a leading threat to cloud security, contributing to incidents with both financial and reputational consequences.

Perhaps most concerning is the opportunity cost. Studies reveal that 44% of Microsoft 365 licenses are underutilised or oversized, indicating that organisations are paying for features they're not fully leveraging. Meanwhile, IT teams spend valuable time on manual tasks that could be automated, preventing them from focusing on strategic initiatives that drive business growth.

A Path Forward

Understanding these challenges is the first step toward addressing them. The remainder of this whitepaper will explore practical strategies for optimising your M365 environment, enhancing security, and freeing your IT team to focus on innovation rather than administration. We'll examine how leading organisations are tackling these challenges and provide a clear roadmap for transforming your M365 management from a source of constant worry into a strategic advantage.

As Alex Hamon notes, "Once we understood the full scope of the challenge, we could start taking strategic steps to address it. The key was moving from reactive to proactive management." The following sections will guide you through this transformation, providing practical insights and actionable recommendations for each aspect of M365 optimisation.

Typical overspend on Microsoft licensing

32%

Underutlised or oversized licences

44%

Number of hours spent on manual tasks per week

15

Section 2:
Understanding Your M365 Environment

The Foundation of Effective M365 Management

Before embarking on any optimisation journey, technology leaders must first gain a comprehensive understanding of their M365 environment. For Tim Smith, this revelation came during a routine security audit: "We thought we knew our environment inside and out, until we started doing a proper assessment. The gaps we found were eye-opening."

This section explores the four fundamental pillars of M365 assessment and provides a practical framework for evaluating your current environment. Through real-world examples and expert guidance, we'll help you build a clear picture of your M365 landscape.

Understanding the Four Pillars

Consider your licence distribution across these key areas

Licence Analysis: Beyond the Basics

Effective licence analysis goes far beyond simply counting users and subscriptions. When Alex Hamon conducted his first comprehensive licence analysis, he discovered patterns that transformed his approach to licence management.

Feature Utilisation

Understanding how your users interact with M365 features is crucial. For instance, one UK manufacturing firm discovered that 65% of their E5 licence holders only used basic email and document sharing features, representing a significant opportunity for cost optimisation.

User Behaviour Patterns

Analysis often reveals distinct usage patterns among different departments. Sales teams might heavily use SharePoint and Teams, while finance departments focus on Excel and Power BI. These patterns should inform your licensing strategy.

Cost Attribution

Modern licence management requires understanding not just the total cost, but the value delivered to each business unit. This insight enables more accurate budget allocation and helps justify technology investments.

Security Configuration: Building Your Defence

Security configuration assessment requires a methodical approach to understanding your current security posture. Tim's experience in financial services provides valuable insight: "We needed to move beyond checkbox compliance to truly understanding our security configuration."

Authentication and Access: Modern security starts with identity. Your assessment should examine:

- The strength of authentication methods across different user groups
- Implementation of Conditional Access policies
- Privileged Identity Management
- Sign-in risk policies

Data Protection Strategy: Understanding your data protection configuration involves:

- Information protection policies
- Data loss prevention rules
- Encryption settings
- External sharing controls

Compliance: Meeting UK Standards

For UK SMEs, compliance isn't optional. Your assessment must consider both current and upcoming regulatory requirements. As Alex notes, "Post-Brexit, we've had to be especially vigilant about data residency and compliance changes."

GDPR Compliance: Assessment should focus on:

- Data handling procedures
- Privacy impact assessments
- Subject access request capabilities
- Cross-border data transfer controls

Industry-Specific Requirements: Different sectors face unique challenges:

- Financial services firms must consider FCA requirements
- Healthcare organisations need to align with NHS Digital standards
- Professional services firms must meet client data protection requirements

Resource Utilisation: Maximising Your Team's Potential

Understanding how your team interacts with M365 is crucial for optimisation. Tim's team tracked their activities for a month and found surprising results: "We were spending 60% of our time on tasks that could be automated."

Administrative Efficiency: Examine your team's time allocation across:

- Routine maintenance tasks
- User support requests
- Security incident response
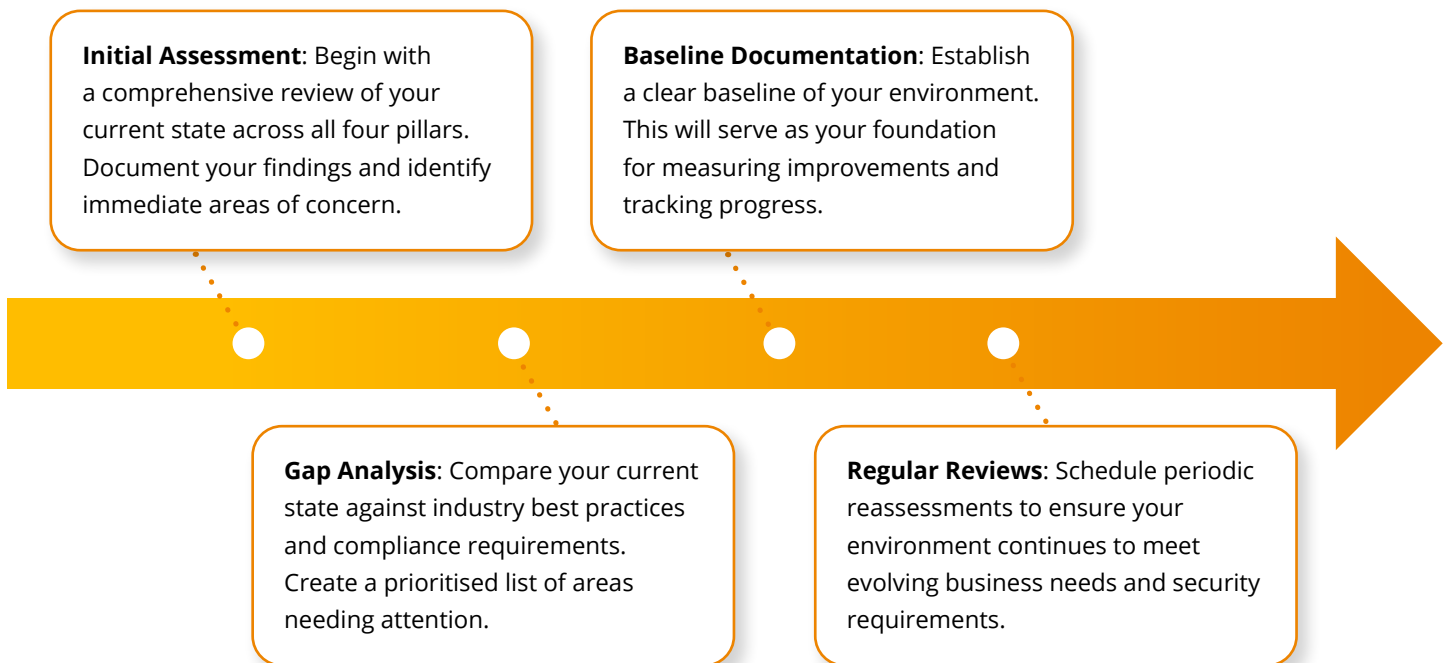- System updates and patches

Security Baseline Assessment

Understanding your security posture requires a structured evaluation framework. Based on our experience with UK SMEs, we've developed this comprehensive assessment model:

Security Element	Basic	Advanced	Optimal
MFA Adoption	< 50% of users protected, basic password policies	50-90% MFA adoption, some risk-based policies	> 90% MFA adoption, comprehensive risk-based authentication
Conditional Access	No policies in place, or basic location-based rules	Basic rule set covering common scenarios	Context-aware policies with risk-based evaluation
Security Monitoring	Manual checks, reactive response	Partial automation with basic alerting	Full automation with AI-driven insights
Data Protection	Default settings, basic DLP	Enhanced controls with some automation	Zero Trust model with comprehensive protection

Taking Action: Your Assessment Roadmap

Understanding your M365 environment is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing journey. Here's how to get started:

Initial Assessment: Begin with a comprehensive review of your current state across all four pillars. Document your findings and identify immediate areas of concern.

Baseline Documentation: Establish a clear baseline of your environment. This will serve as your foundation for measuring improvements and tracking progress.

Gap Analysis: Compare your current state against industry best practices and compliance requirements. Create a prioritised list of areas needing attention.

Regular Reviews: Schedule periodic reassessments to ensure your environment continues to meet evolving business needs and security requirements.

Success Story: From Understanding to Action

When Tim's team completed their first comprehensive assessment, they discovered their environment was significantly more complex than they realised. "The assessment process helped us understand not just where we were, but where we needed to go. It transformed our approach to M365 management."

The next section will explore how to turn these insights into actionable optimisation strategies, ensuring your M365 environment delivers maximum value while maintaining robust security.

Section 3:
The Path
to Optimisation

Transforming Insight into Action

With a clear understanding of your M365 environment, the next crucial step is implementing strategic changes that deliver tangible benefits. For Alex Hamon, this phase proved transformative: "Once we moved from understanding to action, we saw immediate impacts on both our bottom line and our security posture."

Strategic Licence Optimisation

The Art of Right-sizing

Licence optimisation isn't merely about cutting costs—it's about ensuring every user has exactly what they need to perform their role effectively. Tim Smith's experience illustrates this perfectly: "We discovered we were over-licensing some departments while under-serving others. The key was understanding the actual work patterns of different user groups."

Understanding User Profiles

Let's explore how different roles within your organisation map to licence requirements:

Standard Users – The Foundation: These users typically represent 40-60% of your workforce. They need reliable access to core productivity tools but don't require advanced features. For Sarah in Accounts Payable, access to email, Excel, and basic SharePoint collaboration covers 95% of her daily tasks. Business Basic licences provide this functionality while offering significant cost savings over premium options.

Knowledge Workers – The Collaborators: Making up roughly 30% of a typical organisation, these users require more sophisticated collaboration tools. Consider James, a project manager who regularly hosts Teams meetings, collaborates on complex documents, and needs basic security features. Business Premium licences offer the perfect balance of functionality and security for these power collaborators.

Power Users – The Digital Innovators: Comprising about 15% of users, this group needs advanced analytics and security features. Development teams, data analysts, and departmental leaders fall into this category. E3 licences provide the advanced tools these users need without the full compliance suite of E5.

Security and Compliance Teams – The Guardians: A small but crucial segment, typically 5-10% of users, requires the full suite of security and compliance tools. Legal teams, IT professionals, and senior management often need E5 licences to leverage advanced eDiscovery, comprehensive security controls, and detailed analytics.

Case Study: Optimisation in Action

When Alex's team implemented strategic licence optimisation, they discovered:

- **30%** of E5 users could move to E3 without impact
- **25%** of E3 users needed only Business Premium
- Annual savings exceeded **£45,000**
- Security capabilities actually **improved** through better configuration.

Enhancing Security Without Complexity

The Zero Trust Journey

Moving to a Zero Trust security model doesn't have to be overwhelming. Tim's approach demonstrates this: "We broke it down into manageable phases, focusing first on identity protection, then data security, and finally threat management."

Identity Protection: Your First Line of Defence

Modern security starts with identity. Here's how to build a robust identity protection strategy:

Risk-Based Access Control: Implement conditional access policies that consider:

- User location and device status
- Application sensitivity
- Time of access and user behaviour
- Risk signals from Microsoft's security graph

Access Review Automation: Regular access reviews are crucial but needn't be time-consuming. Automated tools can:

- Flag unusual access patterns
- Prompt managers for periodic reviews
- Automatically revoke unused access
- Document all changes for compliance

Privileged Identity Management: Protect your most sensitive accounts through:

- Time-bound administrative access
- Just-in-time privilege elevation
- Detailed activity logging
- Regular privilege reassessment

Data Protection: Securing Your Crown Jewels

Effective data protection requires a balanced approach that secures information without impeding productivity.

Intelligent Classification: Modern data protection starts with understanding what you're protecting:

- Automated content scanning identifies sensitive information
- Machine learning improves accuracy over time
- Classification labels guide appropriate handling
- Policy enforcement follows data wherever it goes

Prevention and Control: Build automated guardrails that protect data while enabling work:

- Data loss prevention policies prevent accidental exposure
- External sharing controls maintain collaboration while managing risk
- Encryption follows sensitive data across devices and locations
- Regular auditing ensures policy effectiveness

Threat Protection: Staying Ahead of Risks

Modern threat protection combines advanced technology with practical processes.

Proactive Defence: Build a defence-in-depth approach:

- Advanced threat analytics identify potential risks
- Automated response actions contain threats quickly
- Behaviour analytics spot unusual patterns
- Regular security posture assessment guides improvements

Measuring Success

Track these key metrics to ensure your optimisation efforts deliver results:

- Licence cost per user (target: 15-30% reduction)
- Security incidents (target: 60% reduction)
- Administrative overhead (target: 75% reduction)
- User satisfaction (target: 40% improvement)

Looking Ahead

Alex reflects on their optimisation journey: "The key was taking a structured approach. We didn't try to do everything at once but focused on high-impact changes first. The results exceeded our expectations in both cost savings and security improvements."

The next section will explore how to implement these strategies using our Clear Path Framework, ensuring your optimisation journey delivers sustainable results.

Section 4:
The Clear Path Framework - Your Implementation Journey

Choosing Your Path to Success

Transforming your M365 environment can seem daunting, but with the right approach, it becomes a structured journey rather than an overwhelming project. Whether you choose to implement these changes internally or seek external guidance, the Clear Path Framework provides a proven roadmap for success.

Two Routes to Transformation

The Self-Implementation Route: For organisations with internal capacity and expertise, this whitepaper provides a comprehensive guide to implementing M365 optimisation independently. The Clear Path Framework outlined here offers a structured approach you can follow, complete with best practices, common pitfalls to avoid, and key metrics to track.

The Guided Implementation Route: For organisations preferring specialist external guidance and support, working with M365 specialists can accelerate your journey through this framework.

Phase 1: Evaluate - Understanding Your Reality

1

Environment Assessment ·······>

- Run the Microsoft Secure Score assessment
- Export licence assignment reports from Admin Centre
- Review Azure AD sign-in logs for usage patterns
- Document current security and compliance settings

Implementation Guide

- Access Microsoft 365 Admin Centre
- Navigate to Reports > Usage
- Export user activity data
- Review Microsoft Secure Score recommendations
- Document findings in a structured format

Security Posture Analysis ·······>

- Review MFA adoption rates and settings
- Audit conditional access policies
- Check data loss prevention configurations
- Assess endpoint management settings

Implementation Guide

- Use Security & Compliance Centre
- Review current policies and their scope
- Document gaps against best practices
- Prioritise required improvements

Phase 2: Explore - Design Your Future State

2

Solution Design Process

Requirements Gathering ·······>

- Document business needs by department
- Map security requirements to solutions
- Identify automation opportunities
- Define success metrics

Implementation Guide

- Create stakeholder interview template
- Schedule department head meetings
- Document specific requirements
- Map requirements to M365 features

ROI Calculation

- Calculate current licensing costs
- Project potential savings
- Estimate implementation effort
- Document expected benefits

Phase 3: Enable - Making Change Happen

3

Licence Optimisation

- Create user groups by requirement level
- Build licence assignment plan
- Test changes with pilot group
- Roll out in phases

Security Enhancement ·······> *Implementation Guide*

- Configure baseline security policies
- Enable advanced security features
- Test impact on user workflows
- Monitor for unexpected issues

- Create detailed project plan
- Build test scenarios
- Develop rollback procedures
- Prepare user communications

Phase 4: Enhance - Optimising for Excellence

4

Performance Monitoring ·······> *Implementation Guide*

- Track key metrics
- Gather user feedback
- Identify optimisation opportunities
- Implement improvements

- Set up monitoring dashboards
- Create feedback channels
- Review system logs
- Document optimisation opportunities

Phase 5: Empower - Ensuring Sustainable Success

5

Knowledge Transfer Documentation ···> *Implementation Guide*

- Create administrative guides
- Document configurations
- Develop troubleshooting procedures
- Build training materials

- Document all configurations
- Create user guides
- Develop maintenance procedures
- Build training program

Implementation Timeline

Phase	Duration	Key Deliverables	Success Indicators
1. **Evaluate**	1-2 weeks	Assessment report, ROI analysis	Clear understanding of current state
2. **Explore**	1 week	Solution design, project plan	Stakeholder buy-in
3. **Enable**	2-3 weeks	Core implementation	Successful pilot completion
4. **Enhance**	2 weeks	Performance optimization	Measurable efficiency gains
5. **Empower**	1 week	Knowledge transfer	Team capability

Note: Timeline assumes dedicated internal resources. External assistance typically accelerates implementation by 40-60%.

Risk Mitigation

Consider these key risk factors when planning your implementation:

Resource Availability

- Assign a dedicated project team
- Plan for peak workload periods
- Have contingency resources identified

Change Management

- Develop a communication plan
- Create training materials
- Plan a phased rollout
- Prepare support resources

Technical Challenges

- Test thoroughly in pilot phase
- Maintain rollback capability
- Document all changes
- Monitor system impacts

Success Metrics

Track these key indicators throughout implementation:

- Licence cost reduction
- Security score improvement
- Administrative time savings
- User satisfaction scores

The Clear Path Framework provides a structured approach to success. The next section will explore how to measure and maintain your optimisation achievements.

Section 5:
Measuring Success - Quantifying Your M365 Transformation

For technology leaders, demonstrating the tangible impact of M365 optimisation often proves challenging. As Alex Hamon discovered, the key lies not in tracking every available metric, but in measuring what truly matters to your organisation. "Being able to show precisely how our changes improved security while reducing costs transformed conversations with the board from discussions about IT spending to discussions about business value," Alex explains.

Understanding What Success Looks Like

The journey to M365 optimisation creates improvements across multiple dimensions of your business. For Tim Smith, success initially seemed difficult to quantify until he focused on four key areas that resonated with both his team and senior leadership. "We stopped trying to measure everything and started focusing on metrics that told our transformation story," Tim reflects.

Financial Efficiency

Financial efficiency stands as a key indicator of success, with many UK organisations achieving significant reductions in licensing costs through optimisation. Microsoft 365 licenses that are either inactive, underutilised, oversized, or unassigned, highlight substantial potential for cost savings through proper license management.

However, the financial impact extends far beyond mere license cost reduction.

Optimising Microsoft 365 licenses not only reduces expenses but also enhances operational efficiency by ensuring that each user has the appropriate license for their specific needs, thereby improving productivity. Moreover, addressing license wastage and security concerns through proper governance can lead to fewer security incidents, further contributing to overall cost savings.

Security Improvements

Security improvements provide another crucial measure of success. The Microsoft Secure Score offers a tangible way to demonstrate enhanced protection against modern threats. Organisations can compare their Secure Score with industry benchmarks and similar organisations, providing valuable context for their security efforts. As one IT Director noted, "Each percentage point increase represented a real reduction in our risk exposure. When we reached 92%, we knew we'd transformed our security posture."

These findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach to Microsoft 365 license management and security optimisation, considering both direct and indirect financial benefits.

Operational Efficiency

Operational efficiency gains often surprise even experienced IT leaders. Consider the reduction in hours required to deploy and manage Microsoft 365 software, which a Forrester study on Microsoft 365 E5 highlighted as a 30% improvement. This transformation frees IT teams to focus on strategic initiatives rather than routine maintenance. Alex's team used this newly available time to drive innovation projects that had previously seemed impossible to resource.

Incident Response Capabilities

Enhancing incident response capabilities is a critical objective for organisations aiming to mitigate the impact of security threats. Implementing advanced security tools, such as Microsoft Security Copilot, has been shown to reduce the mean time to resolution (MTTR) for security incidents by 30% within three months of adoption.

This improvement significantly surpasses traditional response times, enabling security teams to address potential threats more swiftly and effectively. For instance, during a recent investigation, the Microsoft Incident Response team observed that a threat actor progressed through the full attack chain—from initial access to impact—in less than five days, causing significant business disruption for the victim organisation. This underscores the importance of rapid incident response in minimising potential damage.

By leveraging such advanced security solutions, organisations can enhance their monitoring and response capabilities, allowing them to resolve security incidents promptly and prevent potential business impacts.

The Evolution of Measurement

Success metrics should evolve as your optimisation journey progresses. In the early stages, focusing on immediate improvements in licence costs and security scores helps demonstrate quick wins. However, as your programme matures, measurement should expand to encompass broader business impact.

Consider how one UK financial services firm evolved their measurement approach. Initially focused solely on cost reduction, they gradually expanded their view to include user productivity, security effectiveness, and IT team efficiency. This broader perspective helped them identify unexpected benefits, such as improved collaboration between departments and reduced shadow IT usage.

The question of benchmarking often arises when measuring success. While industry benchmarks provide useful context, Tim advises against over-relying on them. "Every organisation's journey is unique. We used benchmarks as guidelines but set our targets based on our specific business needs and starting point." This approach helped his team maintain focus on improvements that delivered real value to their organisation rather than chasing arbitrary industry standards.

Beyond the Numbers

Measuring success extends beyond quantitative metrics. Alex's team discovered valuable qualitative indicators through regular feedback sessions with users and department heads. "The numbers told us we were improving, but the feedback told us how those improvements were affecting daily work," Alex explains. "When users started telling us how much easier it was to work securely, we knew our changes were really making a difference."

This combination of quantitative and qualitative measurement provides a complete picture of transformation success. For instance, while metrics might show improved security scores, user feedback helps confirm whether these improvements are being achieved without hampering productivity—a crucial balance in today's fast-paced business environment.

Looking Forward

Effective measurement does more than justify past investments—it guides future decisions. As Alex reflects, "Our metrics now drive our strategy. We can see exactly where to focus our efforts for maximum impact." This forward-looking approach helps ensure that M365 optimisation delivers continuing value rather than becoming a one-time improvement project.

The next section will explore how to maintain and build upon these measurable improvements, ensuring your M365 optimisation delivers lasting value to your organisation.

Section 6:
Charting Your Path Forward

The Choice: Manual Management or Automated Excellence

Throughout this guide, we've explored the complexities of M365 optimisation and outlined a comprehensive framework for success. As technology leaders like Alex Hamon and Tim Smith have demonstrated, achieving optimal M365 management is possible through either manual implementation or automated solutions with expert support. The choice between these approaches often defines the speed and sustainability of your transformation journey.

Understanding the Implementation Reality

The manual implementation path, while thorough, demands significant time and resource investment. Tim's early experience illustrates this challenge: "We started with manual processes, spending eight to ten hours monthly on licence tracking alone. Daily security checks and weekly compliance audits consumed even more time. While we made progress, the demand on our resources was substantial."

Alex's team faced similar challenges with manual management. "The daily security checks became increasingly burdensome as our organisation grew. We knew we were missing opportunities for optimisation simply because we couldn't review everything frequently enough."

The Power of Automation and Expert Support

The emergence of automated solutions combined with expert guidance has transformed how organisations approach M365 management. Consider the experience of one UK renewables firm that transitioned from manual processes to a managed approach. Their Head of IT reflects, "What previously required constant attention now happens automatically, with monthly expert reviews that highlight priorities. Our team shifted from spending time on routine checks to focusing on strategic improvements."

The impact of this approach extends across every aspect of M365 management:

- Where manual licence tracking once consumed hours each month, automated systems now provide real-time insights
- Security monitoring evolves from periodic checks to ongoing vigilance with expert interpretation
- Cost optimisation becomes an ongoing process rather than a monthly review
- Compliance verification transforms from a weekly burden into a continuous assurance
- Regular expert reviews ensure opportunities aren't missed and priorities remain aligned with business goals

Measurable Transformation

Organisations implementing optimisation solutions with expert support typically experience significant, measurable improvements in their M365 environment. One UK financial services firm achieved a 30% reduction in licence costs within the first month. Another saw their security response times drop from hours to minutes. As Tim notes, "The combination of automation and expert guidance didn't just save time—it improved our overall security posture by catching issues we might have missed manually."

Choosing Your Path Forward

As you consider your next steps, two clear paths emerge:

The manual implementation path provides a structured approach for organisations with sufficient internal resources and expertise. This route requires dedicated time and effort but offers complete control over the process. Successful manual implementation typically involves building internal processes, developing monitoring systems, and maintaining consistent oversight of your M365 environment.

The supported implementation path accelerates this journey through intelligent automation and expert guidance. This approach typically begins with a comprehensive assessment that reveals immediate opportunities for optimisation. With ongoing expert support, organisations maintain continuous improvement rather than experiencing the common cycle of optimisation followed by gradual decline.

Your Journey to Cloud Confidence

Whether you choose manual or supported implementation, the key is taking that first step toward better M365 management. As Alex advises, "The most important decision is simply to begin. The costs of inaction—both financial and in terms of security risk—grow larger every day."

Taking Action

For organisations ready to begin their optimisation journey, Cloud9's M365 Optimise service offers a comprehensive solution combining advanced technology with ongoing expert support. This 12 or 24-month subscription service includes:

- Access to powerful optimisation tools that provide visibility across your entire M365 environment
- Monthly reviews by our Microsoft Cloud security specialists who analyse findings and provide tailored recommendations
- Implementation guidance to help you maximise value from your M365 investment
- Continuous monitoring to identify new optimisation opportunities as they emerge

Through an initial free M365 Optimise assessment, we can help you understand your current position and potential opportunities for improvement. Our team can provide:

- A comprehensive assessment of your current M365 environment
- Detailed analysis of potential cost savings
- Clear visibility of security vulnerabilities
- A customised roadmap for transformation

The Path to Excellence Awaits

Your journey to optimal M365 management begins with a single step. Whether you choose to implement manually or leverage Cloud9's M365 Optimise service, the important thing is to begin. Contact our team today to explore how we can help you achieve true Cloud Confidence.

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Cloud9
SECURITY

Cloud Confidence

This whitepaper is part of Cloud9's commitment to helping UK SMEs achieve Cloud Confidence. Through sharing our expertise and experience, we aim to enable every organisation to realise the full potential of their Microsoft Cloud investment while maintaining robust security and compliance.