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Product Review: Mimecast Unified Email Management

A review of Mimecast Unified Email Management (UEM)'s Unified Email Management.

Author: J. Peter Bruzzese

Product: Unified Email Management

Product Homepage: www.mimecast.com



Introduction

Mimecast is a UK-based provider of unified email management services that, aside from hosting which it does not do (although it works with hosted solutions like Office 365 and others, as well as on-premises messaging), it covers the four main bases beyond messaging: archiving and discovery, continuity, security and email policy.

It's not often I find a product overwhelming (in a good way). Typically, I find products do what they advertise themselves to do within the Exchange realm with a feature or two that might impress me along the way. Where Mimecast's Unified Email Management (UEM) blew me away is that it does everything it advertises so smoothly, through a single console. Through cloud-based, geographically dispersed servers, they provide a 100% service availability SLA (with stiff financial penalties) for their solutions as well.

Let's look at the setup and management tools and then we can isolate the individual features.

Deployment and Administrative Console

Because Mimecast is a cloud-based Software as a Service (SAAS) solution there is no install (although you'll want to deploy an MSI-based add-on for Outlook) but the deployment essentially involves configuring outbound SMTP to go through Mimecast (which is typically done day 1) and inbound SMTP configured through MX changes to go through Mimecast (done day 7). Beyond that, you configure an LDAP connection to use Active Directory for user authentication and you use Exchange Server journaling to set up archiving.

Users will interact with Mimecast through the Outlook client enhancements that allow them to search their archive from within Outlook. In addition, the client also redirects them through Mimecast should their email service go down so that they can continue to send and receive email (hence the term continuity). There is a BlackBerry smartphone application that can be deployed through BlackBerry Enterprise Server (BES) as well. Users can log into their Mimecast Webmail URL, which will provide them with access to their live and historical email and calendar information.

Administrators of the Mimecast solution will have the ability to log into a special administration console (shown in Figure 1). I'd love to use the word 'intuitive' when it comes to the console but really that all depends on your level of experience with all four aspects of email management that Mimecast provides. Even with a solid amount of knowledge and experience with archiving, security and so forth I would recommend new Mimecast admins consider the courses offered to acquaint administrators with all the console features. These range from 1 day in-person classes (in the UK and South Africa) or two-day online classes. It's due to the overall complexity of the console itself combined with the fact that the solution is just so huge in terms of settings and such that we are going to focus on features in general rather than deep dive into checkbox options available within this review.

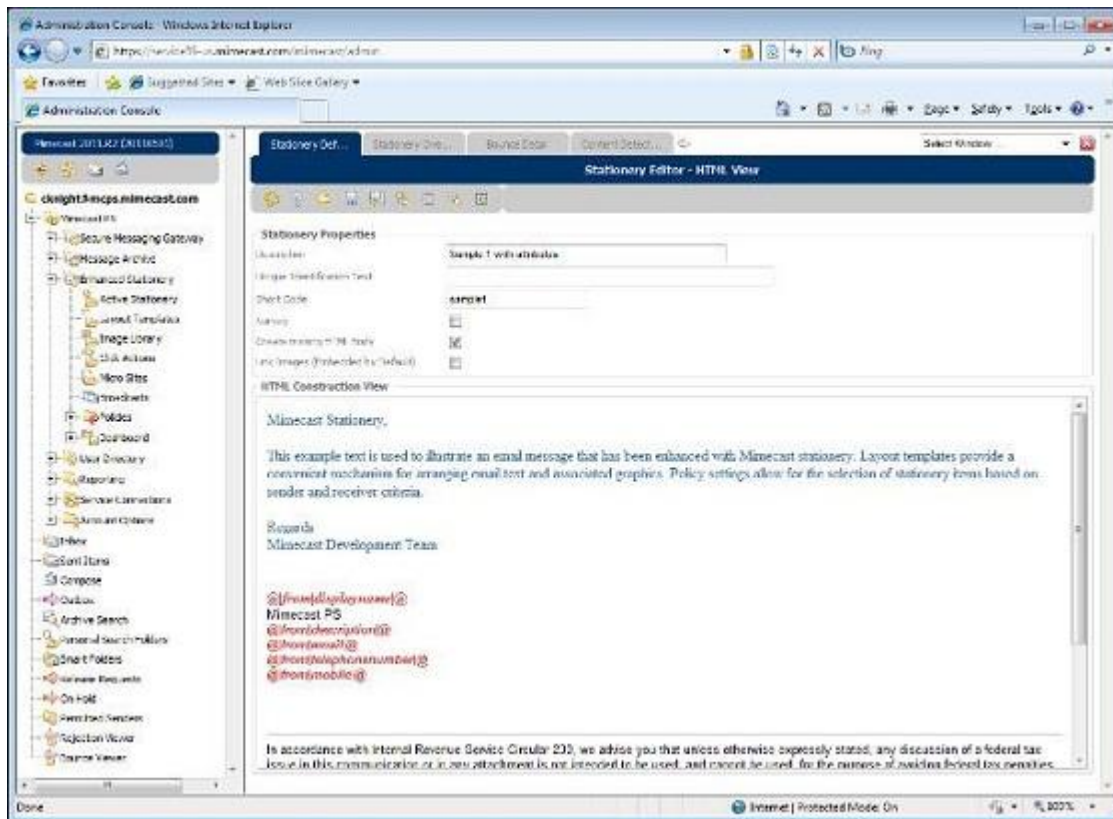


Figure 1: The UEM Administration Console showing the Stationary Editor

Features

Keep in mind that each of these features stands on its own and can be sold separately, however, typically Mimecast customers will pay for the entire UEM bundle.

Archiving: Most often when we say ‘archive’ in the email world we are talking about storing messages offsite for a period of time, typically set by governmental regulatory compliance needs. Mimecast takes archiving to another level by making it something that happens in real-time (meaning users have no chance to intervene in the process) and makes that archived data accessible for both admins and users so that they can access every email they’ve ever sent or received. The default storage period is 10 years although admins have control over retention times. The archived data is tamper proof and the chain of custody is maintained so that, from both a discovery and litigation hold tool perspective, the archive feature is solid. The data is secure and resilient, with a 100% SLA service availability offered, and so Mimecast’s solution, in effect, makes backup/recovery solutions unnecessary. That data is accessible through the web interface (shown in Figure 2) or the Microsoft Outlook add-on interface and so users can search their entire personal email archive from anywhere, at any-time. Admins or compliance officials can perform discovery of the data held in the archive as well. One of the values here is that you can keep your mailboxes smaller (termed bottomless mailboxes) because that data doesn’t have to stay in the mailbox once it is archived, yet still accessible to users but users can still send and receive all the email they wish.

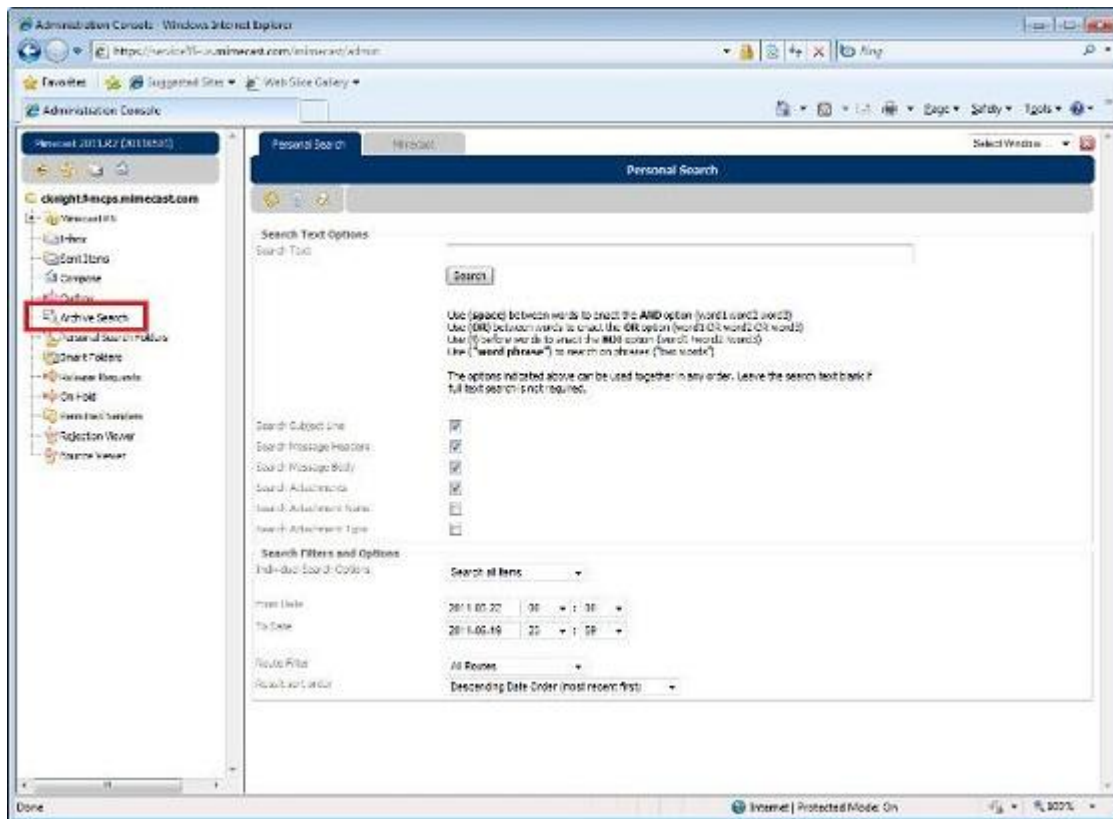


Figure 2: Using Archive Search for personal mailbox search through a browser

Continuity: Mimecast provides the ability to have always-on email for your users. Imagine a scenario where they have on-premises or hosted Exchange and (SLA's aside) the Exchange becomes unavailable. Users typically switch to their local email solutions (provided they have Internet access or through their mobile) and work is somewhat halted or impeded for the period of time the server is offline. Mimecast supports continuity of service through Outlook, Webmail and Blackberry smartphones, for emailing and calendaring services so that regardless of how long the server is down (either due to a problem or service maintenance) your people can keep working. The end user doesn't have to do a thing. It switches over automatically if they are working with Outlook with the add-on provided by Mimecast. Now, being that these services can be sold separately you may be wondering if users can access archive data as well. If you have the archive service, you can access all your archived data in addition to being able to send/receive email through Mimecast. If you don't have the archive service, you can still see your last 58 days of email. For any admin who has had a server go down and had to do a dial-tone recovery to get their people up and running (albeit, without any access to pre-existing email for a time) knows that 58 days is awesome. If you have done the dial-tone recovery then you also are aware of how crazy it is to merge the data from the dial-tone database into the recovered database (if the cause of the server failure was indeed a disk failure or database corruption) but the Mimecast solution pretty much updates the Exchange server with all new messages and calendar item changes without you having to intervene manually.

Security: The threat of virus and spam invasion of your messaging environment is greater than ever and it makes sense to block these things before they even reach your messaging servers. Mimecast's Secure Email Gateway provides protection and scanning of both incoming and outgoing email. Spam, malware, phishing, denial of service and more. Mimecast provides an SLA that offers 100% viral protection and 98% spam protection with 0.0001% false positives. It's great to have a way to protect your environment from messages coming in. But these days there are many ways to get into trouble through messages going out of your organization, either accidentally or on purpose. For example, messages sent with confidential information or credit card or social security data. These data leaks, purposeful or accidental, come with ramifications. Through Mimecast Content Power Tools, Mimecast provides the ability to create content detection definitions (shown in Figure 3 and 4) that can help you to minimize leaks of this sort. The Content Power Tools also provides for enhanced stationary configuration (for disclaimers and signatures and so forth) with policies to help provision that stationary.

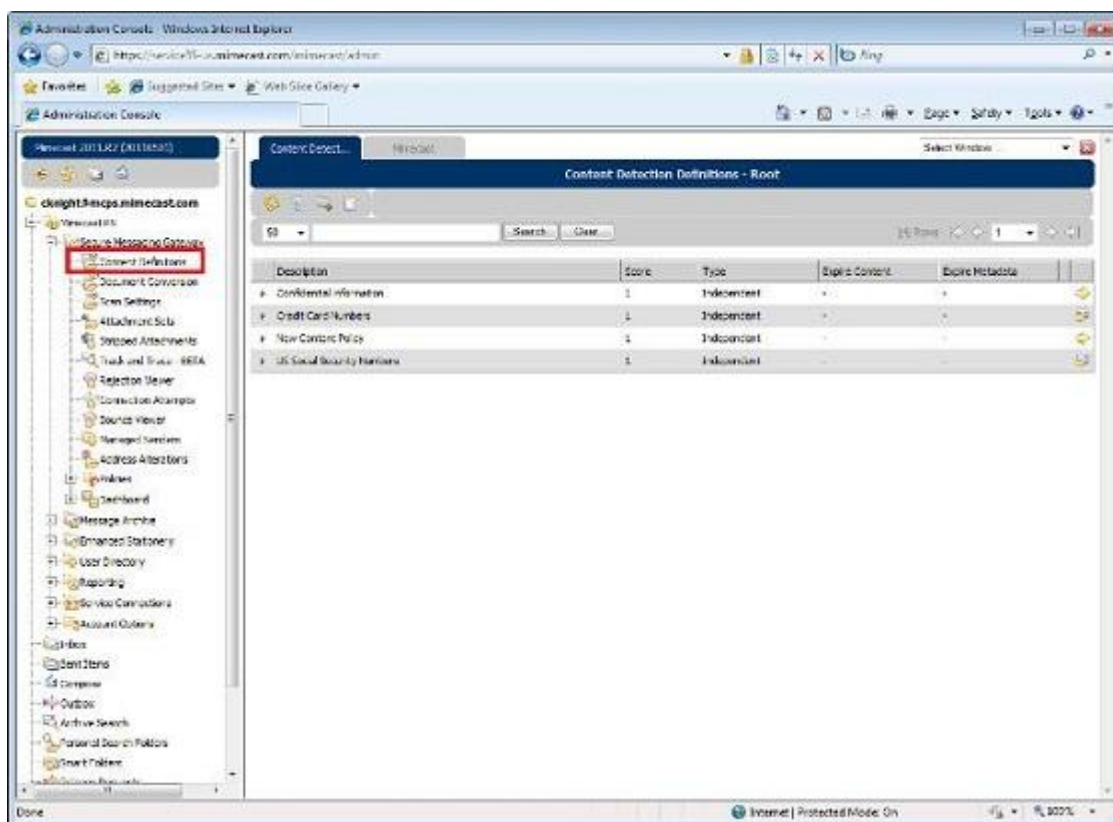


Figure 3: The Content Definitions options with default content detection definitions

Email Policy: The Administration Console provides a centralized way of managing each of the main features of UEM and within the navigation tree is a link called Policies (shown in Figure 5) within each of the solution groups so that you have a one-stop-shop location for total management of your unified solution.

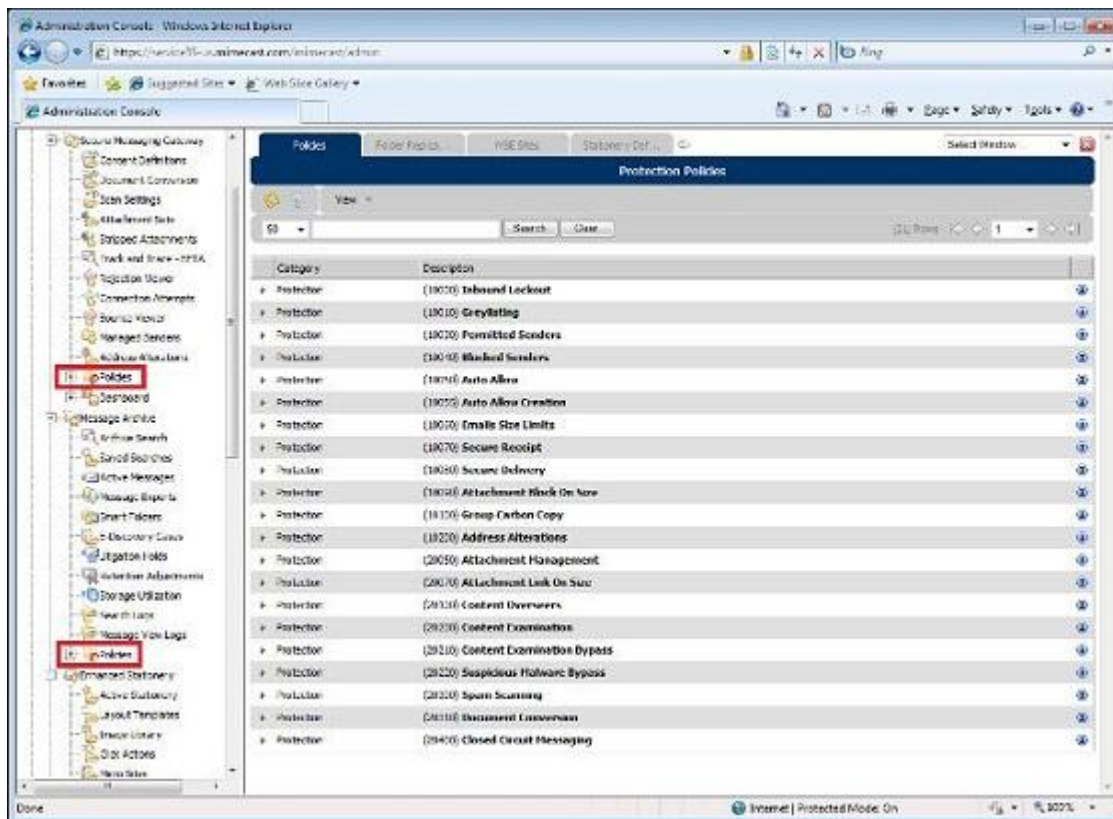


Figure 5: Policy links within the navigation pane of the Administration Console

Additional Features: There are many, many additional features and rather than attempt to find and list them all I'll just mention a few. There is a cornucopia of different reporting features in the Administration Console. There is the ability to strip documents of metadata and perform document conversion. Security includes image and attachment filtering. Messages that are targeted based upon policies are held in a queue for optional review and release. The list goes on.

Pricing and Support

The pricing structure makes sense in that it varies with the number of solutions requested in the bundle from \$2 to \$6 per user per month with bulk discounts offered. Apparently the majority of Mimecast's clients purchase all services in the bundle.

From a support perspective I had the chance to speak with a support representative several times and I found them to be excellent in terms of their skill in conveying the configuration options of the product and making everything quite clear in the process.

Within the Administration Console there is a question mark visible that you can click from any part of the navigation tree and I did find this to be somewhat frustrating because if I click the question mark I expect to be taken directly to a help document on that section. Instead, I'm taken to a central knowledge base with links to the Knowledge Base, Product Overview, Community Forum and Online Videos. On the one hand, all of that support is great to see and worth commending. I also liked seeing that there were classes (mentioned earlier) that can be taken to help admins get up to speed with all of these features. But I'm one of those guys who likes immediate answers when I'm lost and I would have liked a quick dialog that explains the purpose of the tab I'm on and the configuration options available and what to do with them depending on my needs.

Final Thoughts

To reiterate my initial thoughts, I found Mimecast's UEM solution to be overwhelming... in a good way. An all-in-one with features that really just take the worry out of your hands as an administrator. Everything from legal compliance, to backup/recovery concerns, to having your server go down, to worrying about someone accidentally emailing something sensitive like credit card numbers... all of it wrapped up in one bundle. A bottomless email, an add-on for Outlook for users to search their own archive, no more dial-tone restores, a simple stationary tool to establish necessary disclaimers and such (Yes, Exchange lets you do transport rule disclaimers but have you ever tried to make it look good?... If so, you can see the need for an enhanced stationary feature here.)

Aside from some critique of the Help system provided and the obvious need to make the Administration Console more colorful and 21st century in appearance, I think Mimecast has just hit it out of the park with the features they provide. The admin console is a little retro, but a new flavor is in the works and, from what I've seen, it's much more visually appealing. I'm giving them a gold because that is the highest we go.

MSEExchange.org Rating 4.5/5



For more information about Unified Email Management (UEM) visit www.mimecast.com.



About J. Peter Bruzzese

J. Peter Bruzzese (Triple-MCSE, MCT, MCITP) an Exchange MVP, is the co-founder of ClipTraining, an Exchange and SharePoint Instructor for Train Signal, a well-known technical author for Que/Sams and others, a technical speaker for Techmentor, Connections and, at times, TechEd... and the Enterprise Windows columnist for InfoWorld. In his spare time... well, with all that... let's be honest... J. P. B. has no spare time. ;-) Follow him on Twitter @JPBruzzese.