

## Cloud-based Advanced Management and Analytics Tools for Office 365 Allowing Organization to Adopt, Audit, and Deliver a More Secure Stack



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- Carl Baumann

### CEOCFO: *Mr. Baumann, what is the idea behind 4ward?*

**Mr. Baumann:** 4ward365 is a Microsoft certified Gold partner. We focus on Office 365, which is Microsoft's largest enterprise selling platform today. 4ward365 is a SaaS offering that runs on Microsoft Azure. At its core, 4ward365 is an Office 365 framework for advanced reporting, management, adoption/consumption campaigns, and 24/7 health service monitoring.

### CEOCFO: *How widely accepted is Office 365? Are people convinced that is the way to go?*

**Mr. Baumann:** Absolutely, large enterprises are moving very quickly to Office 365 to take advantage of the full breadth of the technology offered within the product. Office 365 is not just email—it is a virtual workplace. When you buy Office 365, not only do you get Exchange Online, which everyone is very familiar with using, but also you get SharePoint Online, OneDrive for Business, Skype for Business, and, of course, Yammer. The combined use of these workloads moves the efficiencies and productivity of the normal workforce into the future. I just read an article yesterday suggesting that Office 365 could have over 100 million active users by the end of 2017.

### CEOCFO: *Are you able to help your clients not only build upon Office 365, but navigate some of the quirksiness that Microsoft tends to engender these days?*

**Mr. Baumann:** We absolutely do that. Part of the trick with Office 365 is educating users to take advantage of all of the technology beyond email. At this point, email is considered a commodity. 4ward365 enhances the overall efficiency for the administrator by adding enhanced management capabilities on top of what Microsoft offers natively out of the box within Office 365. Examples of the enhanced features that we offer include: user delegation, user provisioning, licensing management, the development of sub tenants, and role-based access controls (RBAC).

On top of that, the challenge that Microsoft is facing surrounds the adoption and usage of all the workloads that a customer subscribes to. I feel that Exchange Online has been readily accepted. Everyone who has been in the workforce for the last 15-20 years has been using email extensively, and we have seen these same users gravitate towards what they know and feel comfortable with. In fact, users have been overusing email in some situations where they treat it as a document repository or even a file share. The other workloads found within Office 365 remediate the need to rely too heavily on email alone by offering SharePoint Online and OneDrive for Business. These workloads enhance the users' productivity, efficiency, and overall experience within Office 365 outside of just email. I think the challenge Microsoft has right now is encouraging adoption of other workloads that are selling in the Office 365 suite. Using some of the new

workloads constitutes a real change in how people work, especially over the past decade. To change the way people work—making sure their data is in the cloud, and more importantly, secure—is a real challenge Microsoft faces.

**CEOCFO: *What are some specifics of how you make it easier?***

**Mr. Baumann:** It all starts with education. To start the education process, we identify the users within the organization that require assistance with the technology. One of our core reports tracks the usage and activity of all the subscribed Office 365 workloads. 4ward365 then acts on this report by incorporating a marketing campaign that pulls educational content for users right off the Microsoft support page. This content is then emailed to the user for review, and we can then track whether the user opens, deletes, or watches the training video. This process allows the organization to continue, enhance, or evolve the educational process. The goal is to drive adoption and consumption of the Office 365 workloads that the enterprise is paying for.

**CEOCFO: *What size of organization is a typical customer?***

**Mr. Baumann:** Our sweet spot is enterprise. We have many customers that have between 25,000-50,000 users within their organization, and a few customers with over 100,000 users. With that said, an organization of any size could benefit from using 4ward365—it is a means of bringing the business together and simplifying Office 365. We do have smaller customers, under 100-seats, that also find the solution extremely beneficial. Truth be told, the larger the enterprise, the more complicated the Office 365 deployment is, and that is where we can make the biggest impact.

**CEOCFO: *Do some companies turn to you before they implement Office 365 to get it up and running properly, or are people still going to deploy it on their own and then later realize that they need help?***

**Mr. Baumann:** It depends on the size of the organization. Microsoft has really focused their direct sales efforts and initiatives around the enterprise. For sub-enterprise accounts, which is just about anything under 5,000 seats if I recall correctly, they drive their partners to actually be that conduit to get Office 365 deployed and sold. In most cases, 4ward tends to come in post Office 365 on-boarding. This is because many of the challenges that we help organizations and enterprises overcome typically occur post deployment. We have certainly been brought in pre-Office 365 deployment, but that tends to be for the very large, multinational enterprises that have to go through a hybrid experience and have well over 50,000 users. Truth be told, we tend to find our niche in the market post Office 365 implementation because the challenges that we are fixing are not necessarily before the customer starts Office 365, but after.

**CEOCFO: *Would you tell me about your connection with Italy?***

**Mr. Baumann:** The Italian connection goes back well over ten years while I was working at my previous employer. We required an Italian presence to work on some enterprise projects with Microsoft, and 4ward, the three type Microsoft Gold partner of the year in Italy, rose to the forefront because they stood out as an organization we could trust with the experience that we could rely on. Over the course of the next decade, 4ward evolved into a managed service provider (MSP), building custom solutions around Office 365 for their customers in what I like to call the Mediterranean region, because they handle everything from Spain all the way to Greece. It is a very beautiful place to do your business. 4ward continued their evolution from an MSP, into an ISV, or “independent software vendor.” They were not only able to achieve this through a lot of hard work and trust with Microsoft, but they also listened to clients telling them they needed very specific tools and guidance around the post Office 365 deployment. In 2014, they moved from that managed service, originally a bunch of custom scripts, and productized it into 4ward365.

**CEOCFO: *What is next for 4ward?***

**Mr. Baumann:** Next is continuing to build out our platform. Today, we fit between Microsoft Office 365 and the enterprise, covering all the workloads with 125 action-enabled reports. We would like to branch out by building a complete platform, going into the pre-migration assessment before Office 365 on-boarding starts. We would like to get into more SharePoint management and what we feel is the future: Skype for Business. We started working with a number of key partners and software vendors to help make this a reality, and we will continue developing around the needs of the enterprise customer.

**CEOCFO: *What are you offering now that is not getting traction?***

**Mr. Baumann:** I think there are still a lot of gaps around security—not as something we don’t offer, but more as something that the customer does not recognize. When a customer signs a contract with Microsoft or a partner selling Office 365, they tend to migrate their email from their existing platform to Office 365 very quickly. That can be a bit dangerous because when you migrate this quickly, you do not get the chance to take a step back and properly assess a lot of the security and compliance issues, or most importantly, policy creation. Most organizations that make this jump to the cloud are very forward thinking, having used and created business policies surrounding Exchange Online or another

mail platform for quite some time. Once an organization makes the jump to Office 365, their previous policies become obsolete, which is where 4ward steps in. 4ward addresses policies such as delegation and can provision in a way that makes sense in the cloud. I think that the education to drive the usage of what customers are paying for around SharePoint Online, OneDrive for Business, Skype for Business, and Yammer is currently an afterthought. Any large organization needs to create a solid educational plan to ensure the Microsoft solution they are paying for encourages productivity and efficiency from its users to make sure their investment pays off in the long run.

**CEOCFO: You mentioned a couple times of Office 365 being more than just mail. Is email the area of utmost concern for your users?**

**Mr. Baumann:** I think email is one of these concerns. Moving to the cloud and removing the need for on-premises storage on servers is a big source of cost savings. The ability to potentially re-educate your administrators to do other tasks in the organization are big, but I do think people are looking at the other workloads as well. I think file sharing through SharePoint, saving files on OneDrive, and having all instant messaging and telephone usage through Skype for Business is very appealing for organizations looking to move, however I just do not think they put enough thought into driving education and getting the full power of these productivity tools into their hands.

**CEOCFO: What is the competitive landscape?**

**Mr. Baumann:** There are several companies working specifically in the reporting aspect of this arena, but there is not a company that can go as in-depth across the full range of what we offer. For instance, if you are just looking at a company who is looking to run reports, it will likely run into some serious trouble because Microsoft is releasing Power BI, which pulls the same reports for the same administrators they are trying to sell to. If you take a step back and think about it, what is the point? What makes 4ward extremely attractive to organizations is that our reporting is action enabled, allowing administrators to both analyze the data and take the appropriate management actions. These educational and monitoring actions are critical when it comes to alerting and auditing to make key business decisions and take real action. There is not company on the market that covers the same depth and breadth that we do.

