

The Advantage of an Appliance-Based File Transfer System



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Introduction

Appliances have proven to be a very popular form factor for the delivery of various capabilities, including messaging and security. Appliances have gained popularity because they are easy to deploy, completely self-contained, and require minimal maintenance, resulting in a low total cost of ownership for many organizations

One area in which the appliance form factor can offer enormous benefits is in file transfer applications as a replacement for conventional FTP software installed on in-house servers. The focus of this white paper is to discuss the problem with conventional FTP and to present an appliance-based solution to the problem.

Because email has become ubiquitous in today's professional world, more and more organizations are using email to transfer large files that are commonly associated with day-to-day business operations – an application that email was not originally designed to handle efficiently.

Why Email Doesn't Work for Large File Transfers

Email was designed to facilitate fast communication, specifically the transfer of short messages carrying relatively light payloads. Unfortunately, because email has become ubiquitous in today's professional world, more and more organizations are using email to transfer large files that are commonly associated with day-to-day business operations – an application that email was not originally designed to handle efficiently.

However, because sending large files via email can slow message transmission, clog servers, and reduce overall email performance, many email administrators have placed file transfer limits on email, resulting in a maximum file transfer of five or 10 megabytes in many organizations.

When users must send large files despite these limitations – such as large Microsoft Powerpoint presentations, diagrams, engineering drawings, graphics files and the like – they either resort to FTP systems that are designed for sending large files, or they burn files to a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM and send these files via overnight courier. However, both methods have numerous shortcomings. FTP systems offer speed of transfer and low cost, but they typically lack sufficient security and are generally not as easy to use as email. Burning information onto CD-ROMs or DVD-ROMs is easy to do, but does not maintain security, offer speed of data transfer or cost.

While FTP is a useful technical solution for file transfer, it suffers two major problems as a business tool:

- The typical FTP user interface is not as easy to use as the typical email interface, particularly for the occasional business user.
- FTP management can consume a significant amount of IT staff time, both in terms of keeping track of files and maintaining user accounts.

Further complicating the issue is that regulations like HIPAA, FDA 21 CFR Part 11 and Sarbanes-Oxley impose additional demands on file transfer infrastructures, requiring more IT management. Because most FTP systems are not designed to track files, business processes that use FTP to deliver information or other digital assets are not auditable and, thus, are not compliant. Although new flavors of FTP – such as SFTP, FTPS and EFTP – go farther in helping users comply with these and other regulations, the requirement that specialized clients be installed on user's computer gets in the way of adding users that cannot or do not want to take the time to install the client program.

There is clearly a business demand for a solution that offers the efficient file transfer capabilities of FTP with the ease of use and auditability of email.

A Better Alternative to FTP is Needed

There is clearly a business demand for a solution that offers the efficient file transfer capabilities of FTP with the ease of use and auditability of email. The key features of such a system are the following:

- **The ability to mimic email functionality without being part of the messaging infrastructure.**
By mimicking email functionality, these solutions minimize end-user training requirements while offloading the attachment files onto a parallel infrastructure.
- **Ease of management and maintenance.**
As an integral part of the IT infrastructure, such a capability should require only a minimum investment of IT staff time to maintain. The appliance form factor is ideally suited to provide minimal maintenance investments.
- **Embedded business level security.**
Business-grade security requirements extend beyond the technical needs of data encryption via SSL and other means. They also include the need to authenticate

recipients and the ability to automatically manage the file and account lifecycle so that there is no confidential information left exposed and unattended beyond the timeframe it is needed.

- **Easy auditability and traceability.**
Good business practice, as well as new legal and regulatory requirements, dictate that all aspects of business processes, including file transfer, be auditable.

A comparison of various file transfer capabilities is shown in the table below.

Comparison of Various File Transfer Capabilities

Good business practice, as well as new legal and regulatory requirements, dictate that all aspects of business processes, including file transfer, be auditable.

	FTP	Newer FTP (SFTP, FTPS, EFTP)	Email Attachments	Accellion Secure File Transfer Appliance
Suitable for ad-hoc file delivery	No	No	Yes	Yes
Required end user client installation	No (Browser)	Yes	No	No (Browser)
Manual account creation and deletion	Yes	Yes	No	No
Manual deletion of files	Yes	Yes	Shifts problems to mail server	No
Reporting and visibility	Log files	Varies	Difficult	Yes
Learn and install new client	No	Yes	No	No
Can send very large files	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
File up mailboxes	No	No	Yes	No
Require administrator intervention (create accounts)	Yes	Yes	No	No
Guaranteed recipient receipt notification	No	No	No	Yes

Conclusion

Among on-demand secure file transfer solutions, it makes sense for any organization to consider the use of a File Transfer Appliance (a) – a dedicated appliance that can solve the problems associated with conventional file transfer processes that are currently handled through email or FTP-based solutions. This type of appliance can benefit IT departments through its low maintenance and management requirements, all without clogging up email servers or time consuming FTP server administration . FTAs also solve the file transfer problem for end users by allowing easy access to robust file transfer capabilities that include auditability and ease of use.

As the market becomes familiar with file transfer appliance solutions, we believe FTAs will become an increasingly common component in a well equipped IT shop.

As the market becomes familiar with file transfer appliance solutions, we believe FTAs will become an increasingly common component in a well equipped IT shop. In fact, a shift towards FTAs has already begun, as we increasingly see more vendors offering FTAs that satisfy a growing number of technical and business requirements.

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