

# Moving Beyond FTP for Large File Transfers



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## Introduction

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Most business users must periodically send large electronic files to remote destinations. Although FTP is a better option than email for sending large files, many businesses find the technology difficult to use and IT administrators balk at FTP's lack of manageability.

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Given the importance of file sharing in everyday business transactions both inside and outside an organization, a better solution to the problem of using FTP is to replace it with a secure, ad hoc file transfer framework. For many organizations, such a secure infrastructure might best be implemented through an appliance-based system that can be deployed quickly and integrates nicely into existing business processes.

## The Problem With FTP

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FTP began as a programmer's tool designed to exchange large files. However, because of FTP's utility in transferring large amounts of information, it has grown in popularity among businesses in industries such as advertising and graphic design, which frequently send a large amount of information as part of a normal business day. Although email often is used instead of FTP in most business processes because it is a more user-friendly and ubiquitous tool, server loading, disk quotas and corporate policies often require that files above five to ten megabytes must be sent via FTP.

While FTP is a logical technical solution for transferring large files, it suffers from two major flaws when used as a business tool:

- The typical FTP user interface often detracts from the experience of using the protocol, particularly for non-technical users.
- FTP management is not a trivial issue and requires more time than many IT departments have to devote to it.

### *Users Problems With FTP*

Even if business users become comfortable with the somewhat spartan nature of the typical FTP interface, there are still problems with using FTP. For example, business users who upload files to an FTP server typically do not remove them, resulting in directories that contain hundreds or even thousands of old files that are not identified properly and

that can expose sensitive data to unwanted exposure. Further, FTP does not have native capabilities that ensure users access only the latest versions of files found on the server. The result is that unless rigid processes are followed by all FTP users, valuable time and resources can be wasted simply because people are accessing the wrong files.

### ***IT Problems With FTP***

IT departments typically do not care for FTP because the same ID/password is frequently shared among multiple users, a practice that can lead to serious security problems. Creating and administering FTP accounts is a time consuming task. Further, IT administrators charged with cleaning up an FTP server that has been in use for some time often have insufficient information about which files must be kept and which can safely be discarded.

Yet another problem with FTP is that native systems do not have audit and security capabilities that can comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Section 404 of Sarbanes-Oxley and 21 CFR Part 11. In short, the use of native FTP results in the storage and delivery of information assets that are not auditable or compliant. While newer FTP protocols – such as SFTP, FTPS and EFTP – can achieve more security than traditional FTP, they may be more difficult for many organizations to implement than traditional FTP because of coordination and administration issues.

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## **A New Approach to Large File Transfers**

Because of the shortcomings of FTP, organizations in need of sending large files are beginning to consider a new paradigm for sending these files. Secure, ad hoc file transfer solutions that mask the underlying technical complexity of the solution from non-technical users, while still allowing businesses to design processes that are easy to use and meet security and compliance requirements, are the next generation in file transfer solution, and a useful alternative to FTP.

### *File Transfer System Features*

The features of a secure, ad hoc file transfer system should include:

- The ability to mimic email functions without being part of the email messaging infrastructure. By mimicking email functions, user training is minimized, while at the same time offloading attachments into a parallel infrastructure. Attachments can constitute up to 80% of all email traffic in some organizations.
- The ability to embed business level security. For many organizations, business security requirements extend beyond just encryption and include the ability to authenticate recipients and to manage file lifecycles in order to minimize exposure of sensitive data.
- The ability to easily manage and maintain the system. A low total cost of ownership for IT is key to the success of any new system, including file transfer systems.

*Among secure ad hoc file transfer solutions, it makes sense for any organization to consider the use of a File Transfer Appliance (FTA) – a dedicated appliance that can solve the problems associated with conventional file transfer processes that are currently handled through email or FTP-based solutions.*

### **Conclusion**

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Among secure ad hoc file transfer solutions, it makes sense for any organization to consider the use of a File Transfer Appliance (FTA) – 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, and can easily solve current file transfer problems. FTAs also solve the file transfer problem for end users by allowing them easy access to file transfer capabilities that include auditability and ease of use. A comparison of Accellion's Secure FTA and alternative solutions is shown in the table below.

**Comparison of Various File Transfer Capabilities**

	FTP	Newer FTP (SFTP, FTPS,EFTP)	Email Attachments	Accellion Secure File Transfer Appliance
<b>Suitable for ad-hoc file delivery</b>	No	No	Yes	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Required End User Client Installation</b>	No (Browser)	Yes	No	<b>No (Browser)</b>
<b>Manual Account Creation and Deletion</b>	Yes	Yes	No	<b>No</b>
<b>Manual deletion of files</b>	Yes	Yes	Shifts problems to mail server	<b>No</b>
<b>Reporting and Visibility</b>	Log files	Varies	Difficult	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Learn and Install New Client</b>	No	Yes	No	<b>No</b>
<b>Send very Large Files</b>	Yes	Yes	No	<b>Yes</b>
<b>File up Mailboxes</b>	No	No	Yes	<b>No</b>
<b>Require Administrator Intervention (create accounts)</b>	Yes	Yes	No	<b>No</b>
<b>Guaranteed Recipient receipt notification</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>

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