10 Ways to Modernize Your Managed File Transfer

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Just Say "Yes" and Speed to More Business Revenue

Companies are struggling to harness the massive volumes of new data created every day from a multitude of new sources both internal and external to their organization. The objective is clear: Gain end-to-end visibility to what's happening in and around the business, and determine new ways to improve operations while scaling technology to meet new business requirements. Whether companies embrace a big data model, or look to improve data workflows within the back and front-end of the business, the management of all forms of data requires a strong managed file transfer (MFT) component to their B2B integration strategy.

MFT certainly is not a new concept – it's often considered an "old school" technology – but its newer forms are more critical than ever to enabling a wide range of information integration use cases required by new and shifting business needs. In fact, its fundamental capabilities of managing, controlling, and governing important business data flows may be more important now than ever given the explosion of digital data in the new millennium.

Unfortunately today, many companies are limited by legacy B2B integration and older and incomplete MFT solutions that may have been custom-built, requiring a high degree of maintenance or added expense for users with specialized skillsets. Additionally, some integration and MFT vendors have sunsetted some of their technology, ending critical support for the system (or charging exorbitant fortunes to maintain it), and stranding their customers with slow and unsecured data movement. Even outsourced solutions become costly and lack the control visibility over all data exchanges moving throughout their organization.

That's not to say that these legacy or outsourced solutions don't work. The fact is, they probably work quite well, which is why they are still in use. But these solutions deliver inefficient file movement that doesn't meet current volumes, auditing, SLA, and reliability standards, leading to more manual efforts than a company can afford.

There likely won't be a need, then, to rip and replace solutions that are proven to work, so long as they can easily connect, orchestrate, and track data movement. But with the digital data revolution driving increased volumes, expanding file sizes, varying formats, and growing security and compliance mandates, you have to consider your current and future needs and decide how much confidence you have in the incumbent MFT functionality carrying your business into the future.

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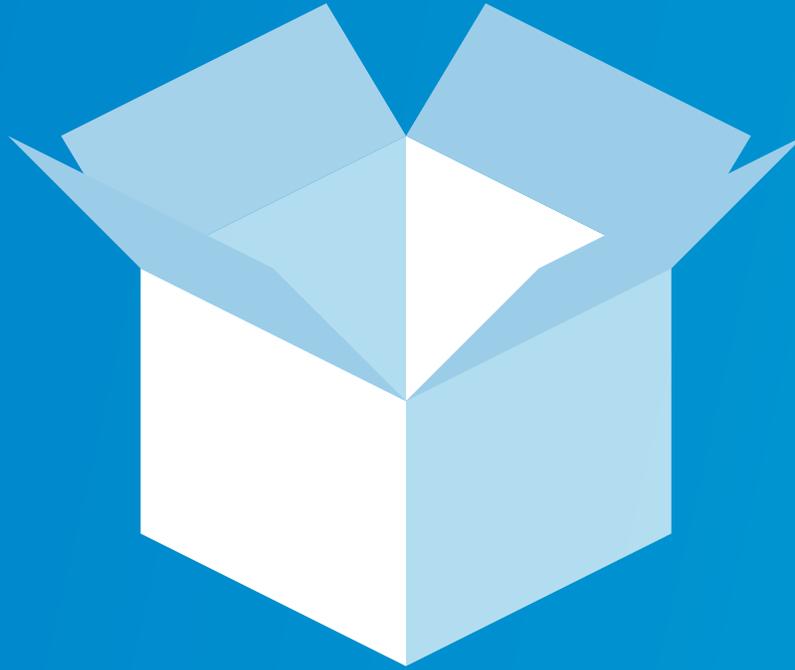
10 MFT Capability Considerations

Regardless of your industry, the need for security, visibility, and data governance across all people, applications, and systems in the business ecosystem will only increase.

Here are 10 considerations when evaluating the capabilities of your existing MFT solution or a replacement to help your business better meet existing and future use-case requirements:

1. Speed to implementation
The speed of business today is ever-increasing, and the MFT solution running your organization should keep pace without a hitch. Low customization, minimal professional services, and faster migration from homegrown or legacy solutions facilitate a faster time to revenue. Upon successful implementation, a leading solution also will require fewer services over the technology's life span to maintain its capabilities, leading to a lower overall total cost of ownership. How quickly can you deploy this technology and begin capitalizing on new business faster? This agile implementation paves the way for faster onboarding of new partners and greatly improved operational speed, which is discussed more in Point #4.

2. Integration consolidation
The variety of internal and external data sources – customers, suppliers, partners, contractors, applications, and other endpoints integral to your business – continues to grow as businesses adopt newer and better technologies. These pieced-together systems, which often can't communicate with one another without heavy scripting, tend to accumulate and build silos among departments and business units, severely hampering visibility into critical workflows. Consolidating redundant systems, streamlining workflows, and automating processes yields improved data flows, better business agility, and increased visibility into routine operations.

3. Minimal skillsets

How many people know how to manage your current MFT solution? If it goes down when someone is out sick or on vacation, does business stop? What would happen if that person left your company or retired? The point of modern MFT technology is to manage highly complex file transfer processes so you don't have to, and maintaining this technology shouldn't be a highly specialized skill. Don't settle for anything less than an easy-to-use solution featuring an intuitive user interface and can be trusted in the hands of the "citizen integrator" – often a non-technical business user – who can deploy and manage it without constant IT intervention.

4. Faster onboarding

How fast can you securely add new connections, test them, and enable effective and reliable data movement within and beyond company boundaries? As you grow and add new secure connections, the speed at which you can add them translates into your ability to more quickly embrace new business requirements, new business partners, new revenue sources, and new value. Modern MFT solutions deliver such value via a library of preconfigured connections.

Without such preconfigured connections, the effort to onboard new trading partners can be as much as 80% more labor-intensive. Your business won't have to start from scratch to digitally connect to popular trading partners (think Walmart, Lowe's, GM, etc.), so these automated toolsets accelerate partner onboarding fourfold, meaning you can start doing more business in hours instead of days.

5. Migration without downtime

Maintaining uptime differentiates one company from the next, especially in the data-centric services industries. How quickly can you move data off your old MFT system into another? A modern MFT solution features design-time tools to reuse pre-existing templates to get your systems mapped more quickly and without service disruption. The benefits include simplified planning for integration projects, building and maintaining applications without added scripting, and delivering integration results faster.

6. Data transformation

Business systems' inability to accept even a single file type can have expansive implications throughout the enterprise. Limiting the ability to add new enterprise connections and also limiting existing trading partner relations are not steps toward business growth, and attacking the problem with hand-coding is a cumbersome and temporary fix. Your modern MFT solution should seamlessly accept any file type (EDI, XML, flat files, etc.) – from such sources as systems of record, EDI programs, and leading enterprise resource planning (ERP) tools –and empower the organization to say "yes" to new lines of business faster.

Even better, add more contemporary integration methods by translating content to and from spreadsheets to better enable integration of human endpoints. In still other cases, data formats have been invented to enable applications to accept certain kinds of transactions. What if you could skip those steps and directly translate data within databases as sources or targets?

7. Large-file movement

Keeping pace with the speed of business, as mentioned above, presents a growing business challenge with file sizes and volumes swelling and transfer time for such files exponentially increasing. So what good is your data if you have to wait for it or can't move it at all? Traditional methods (email, FTP, consumer file-sharing tools, etc.) fail to reliably move such massive files, but accelerated file transfer protocols expedite transfers for large, yet routine information exchanges and also to meet the demands of big data integration projects. This TCP-based technology within leading MFT platforms breaks down a large file into smaller pieces, optimizing network bandwidth and existing infrastructure, and reassembles it on the back end for the fastest file delivery on the market.

8. High availability

What happens if your business goes down, even for a few minutes? How much revenue would that lose, short term and long term? Meeting and exceeding customer SLAs — with file delivery and responses measured in milliseconds — requires best-in-industry uptime and high availability. The inability to eliminate unscheduled downtime will send that customer to a competitor who can deliver it. A gold-standard MFT solution offers a high-availability architecture to eliminate multiple points of failure, ensure maximum uptime, and reduce customer churn within your enterprise.

9. Ensure compliance

A global business environment means your business must meet a revolving door of SLAs (service-level agreements), demanding customer engagements, government and industry mandates, international trade laws, and internal business rules. Modern MFT technology takes the compliance burden out of the hands of sales operations and legal teams by intrinsically delivering the security, visibility, and auditability required for business to continue. If your company's current MFT solution lacks the dashboards, reports, and automated alerts that simplify compliance, it's time to look for a better solution.

10. Scalability to meet future business needs

The technology you need now may not necessarily be what you need in a year or even a few months from now. And that's OK; the future is difficult to predict. But as your business grows, your critical data workflows have to grow with it. Deploying an agile MFT platform that integrates with legacy technologies, supports modern innovation like cloud integration and APIs, and agilely accommodates emerging data and integration use cases pours the foundation for a future-proofed enterprise. A carrier-grade solution supports continual growth and service expansion without your IT teams having to go out and find yet another new solution vendor every few years.

Summary

Modern MFT is designed to connect all of your information sources and consumers in a way that drives business agility with a simple user experience to manage data movement across your organization and beyond.

With legacy and outsourced MFT technologies, companies are at a disadvantage when it comes to managing business-critical file transfers, especially when they fall short in meeting even one of these 10 considerations.

It's critically important for forward-thinking organizations, then, to adopt MFT technology that meets all of these considerations in a single platform that can address other emerging information integration needs, including cloud and big data initiatives.

A single, centralized integration platform will accelerate data process workflows by consolidating the many disparate best-of-breed applications that run your business, rapidly moving data of any type or size to where it needs to go, and employing the easy-to-use visibility tools to know it got there. On time. In the right format. Every time.

Regardless of industry, gain the visibility and governance for all data transactions to make your operations more efficient, increase responsiveness to your customers, and of course, increase the opportunity to make more money by doing more business faster.

If you'd like to learn more about how Cleo can help meet your MFT needs, visit www.cleo.com/mft or contact Cleo today.

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