

Integrating Identity

By *identity*, I mean the various systems that are used to authenticate and authorize users on your systems. When you start using cloud applications, managing identity on each of your applications will become a problem. In short, just about every cloud service you subscribe to will have its own identity management system in which you set up users and assign permissions. And each service will have its own password management systems, with different requirements for length and complexity.

All of these identity management systems are in addition to the one you already have: Active Directory.

Wouldn't it be nice if you could unify them all, so that all your cloud services were integrated with your existing Active Directory accounts, and you could manage accounts and authorize access to cloud services through a single management console?

The good news is that you *can* — or at least you can come close. Taking the steps to make this happen will go a long way toward simplifying the relationship between your on-premises IT and your cloud IT.

Azure Active Directory

An obvious place to start with unifying your identity management is *Azure Active Directory* (AAD). AAD is Microsoft's cloud-based version of Active Directory. On its own, AAD won't solve all your cloud identity management problems. But it will enable you to integrate Office 365 identities with Active Directory, and it will extend your on-premises Active Directory into Azure, if you choose to use Azure as a cloud platform.

AAD is sold as a subscription service with four editions:

- » **Free:** Includes basic Active Directory features with a limited number of objects in the directory (the current limit is half a million, so the free edition can accommodate a fairly large directory). Unfortunately, this edition is sparse on features — many of the features you've come to know and love in standard on-premises Active Directory require premium subscriptions.
- » **Office 365:** This version is included with an Office 365 subscription and provides unlimited directory size, all the basic features of the free edition, plus self-service password management, company branding for login pages, and a few other bells and whistles.