

# Why you shouldn't disable external sharing (really)

Okay, so anyone who has ever done consulting with Microsoft / Office 365 before has probably heard this question:

“Can we disable external sharing?”

–Any customer at every Office 365 consulting engagement, ever.

Bless their souls, these questions are usually coming from a good place, but to see why this is actually not a great idea, let's look at this chart.

External sharing: risk mitigation		
Concerns or risks	Does restricted sharing mitigate risk?	What would mitigate the risk?
Someone accidentally shares content to the wrong audience (gasp!)	No (Because of Email)	Choose one: A) Block email? B) Turn off the Internet? C) Governance and end-user training?
Oh wait, that's pretty much the only concern, isn't it?	N/A	N/A

You see, disabling the external sharing capabilities of OneDrive or SharePoint or any other modern application does not make you any safer. In fact I argue that it does the exact opposite. It keeps your users in the dark ages of document sharing and collaboration.

Let's look at just one more chart that demonstrates what I'm talking about:

## File Sharing: Email (legacy) vs. Modern collaboration

Capabilities	Email attachments	OneDrive/Teams
Track/audit sharing?	Difficult	Yes-Easily!
Revoke access?	Nope	Yes
Version control?	No—just sprawl	Yes, built-in history!
Co-Authoring	No	Yes
File size limits	~ 25 – 150 MB	~10 GB
Geezer-era legacy tool	Yes!	No (Not yet)

Modern collaboration is in every way superior to email attachments  
 And we could go on. When you disable guest access or external sharing, this is what you're doing to your users: relegating them to an ancient technology that was never designed for file sharing to begin with.

## Everyone needs external sharing

If you are in the business of making money, then I am guessing you need to:

1. Produce stuff that is of value to *others*
2. Share said stuff with said others

If you were in a company that allowed zero external sharing, I can't imagine that you would be in business too long. Every single person who could be called an "information worker" essentially has the same job description, or one of a handful. They:

1. Create
2. Consume
3. Find
4. Manipulate
5. Protect
6. Govern
7. Report on...

On... what? On **data**. People today must know how to do one or more of the above things with *data*. Data in the 21st century is officially more valuable than oil or gold. So you are going to have to learn to work with it better—you will need to become a *steward* of data.

How quickly can you find data?

How easily can you share it, manipulate it, and iterate on it?

Can you govern and protect it effectively—granting only as much access as is necessary to those whom need it (and for the time they need it)?

Or what about managing data life cycles? Can you sunset data when it is no longer serving you, and indeed, when it could even become a liability?

Getting the picture?

If you're still relying on ancient technology like monolithic file servers with archaic folder hierarchies and email attachments... I'm sorry to say but you're not well prepared for the future of data stewardship.

## Everyone is responsible for data

In some sense every person needs to become an IT person moving forward. Not a full fledged IT professional, but there is certainly a baton that is being passed here. *With great power comes great responsibility*, right Spidey?

Modern tools like Microsoft 365 give users SUPERPOWERS that they have never had before. People can provision and create their own technology resources, their own permissions and groups! *They* can decide when, how and with whom they will share their content.

Data governance, too, is a concept that is just barely entering the collective consciousness of small and mid-sized businesses. And, with the mix of various personal devices becoming part of the corporate fold, this implies even more responsibility.

Therefore, technology is not the purview of IT alone (it never was), because the data belongs to *everyone*—to the organization as a whole and to individuals within the organization. It is how businesses interact with and provide value for their customers, their partners and so forth.

Therefore, external sharing is not something you disable. It's just not. Govern it? Sure. Train users on it? Definitely. Block it? Goodness, no—rarely, if ever.

Remember that you can leave External sharing wide open, but adjust it down on any given site collection or library, as needed. You can have totally confidential libraries. Just don't throw out the baby with the bath water by smashing down the external sharing capabilities at a global level. Please!

