

Proofpoint vs. Mimecast vs. Microsoft Defender for Office 365

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Unvarnished Reviews Research

This report synthesizes data from 1,200+ verified user reviews and practitioner community posts collected from G2 (Proofpoint Core Email Protection 4.6/5 from 582 reviews, Mimecast Advanced Email Security 4.4/5 from 315 reviews, Microsoft Defender for Office 365 4.5/5 from 288 reviews), Capterra, Reddit r/sysadmin and r/cybersecurity, Vendr contract dataset analysis, VendorBenchmark (140+ Mimecast contracts analyzed, March 2026), CostBench independent pricing analysis (April 2026), and TechnologyMatch independent comparison (May 2026). Pricing data reflects vendor pricing pages and independent pricing analyses current as of June 2026. Full research methodology at unvarnishedreviews.com/methodology. Research Notes available on request at editorial@unvarnishedreviews.com.

The Verdict Up Front

Proofpoint is the enterprise email security incumbent, built when on-premise Microsoft Exchange was the standard and grown through Microsoft 365's cloud migration as the third-party Secure Email Gateway that security teams trust more than Microsoft's native tools. It leads this comparison in threat intelligence depth, BEC (Business Email Compromise) detection, and compliance capabilities. Its G2 Anti-Phishing score of 9.1 versus Mimecast's 8.8 reflects a documented performance advantage on the threat category that costs organizations the most money: BEC attacks cost organizations \$2.9 billion in reported losses in 2023 alone, more than ransomware, more than data breaches, and more than any other cybercrime category tracked by the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center. Proofpoint's standard 5% annual price uplift is only negotiable with multi-year commitments. Organizations that renew year-over-year without competitive quotes pay escalating costs with no leverage.

Mimecast is the email security platform built for operational simplicity and total cost of ownership, with email continuity as its most distinctive differentiator. Mimecast maintains a cloud archive of your email that acts as a continuity layer if your primary email environment goes down. For organizations where email availability is a business-critical requirement, that continuity layer is meaningful. Mimecast's documented commercial liabilities are the most severe in this comparison: steep renewal price increases of 25%+ annually are documented across Reddit r/sysadmin and independent analysis; data export fees and migration throttling at approximately 1TB/week create documented vendor lock-in; and CostBench documents at least 4 hidden costs. A Reddit reviewer captures the renewal experience directly: "They will have their pound of flesh, they are not very flexible with pricing. The price on the quote is what you pay and they can and will true you up mid-contract if they detect you over your licence count."

Microsoft Defender for Office 365 is included in Microsoft 365 E5 at zero incremental cost. Organizations already on E5 have no additional cost for Plan 2, which provides advanced threat protection, attack simulation training, and threat intelligence. For organizations on E3 or Business Premium, Defender Plan 1 adds at \$2/user/month. The most important finding for every Mimecast renewal: organizations with active M365 E5 adoption can credibly threaten to retire Mimecast in favor of Microsoft Defender for Office 365 Plan 2, included in E5 at zero incremental cost. VendorBenchmark's analysis of 140+ Mimecast contracts shows 10-15 points renewal improvement consistently achievable when this threat is visibly positioned to Mimecast account leadership. However, Microsoft Defender is not competitive with Proofpoint or Mimecast for BEC detection or targeted attack protection on equivalent tiers. For organizations with dedicated security teams and complex threat environments, Defender is a cost-efficient baseline, not a replacement for advanced third-party protection.

Recommendations: For large enterprises with dedicated security teams, complex threat environments, and BEC as a primary risk: Proofpoint, with multi-year commitment to control the 5% annual uplift. For organizations evaluating Mimecast renewal: model Microsoft Defender E5 capability explicitly before accepting any renewal pricing. For organizations on M365 E5 with moderate threat environments: Microsoft Defender for Office 365 Plan 2 at zero incremental cost is the starting point before adding third-party protection.

The BEC Context: Why Email Security Is Not a Commodity Purchase

Business Email Compromise is the highest-value cybercrime category tracked by the FBI IC3. The numbers documented for 2023 are the most recent publicly reported:

- \$2.9 billion in reported losses from BEC in 2023
- More than ransomware losses
- More than data breach losses
- Median loss per BEC incident: over \$50,000

BEC attacks are plain-text emails that look exactly like a message from your CFO, your law firm, or your largest vendor. They are not caught by spam filters or attachment scanners. They require behavioral analysis, sender authentication, and threat intelligence that basic email filtering does not provide.

This context frames the email security evaluation correctly: the question is not which platform provides the cheapest spam filtering. The question is which platform provides the most reliable BEC detection for your organization's specific threat profile. The cost difference between Proofpoint and Microsoft Defender for Office 365 Plan 1 is approximately \$1-\$4/user/month. A single BEC incident has a median loss of \$50,000. For most organizations, the math strongly favors advanced protection.

The M365 E5 Calculation: The Finding That Changes Every Mimecast Renewal

Microsoft 365 E5 (\$57/user/month) includes Microsoft Defender for Office 365 Plan 2 at zero incremental cost. For organizations already paying for E5, the effective cost of Defender email security is \$0/user/month additional.

Organizations on E3 (\$36/user/month) must add Defender Plan 1 at \$2/user/month or Plan 2 at \$5/user/month as add-ons.

The Mimecast renewal leverage calculation:

VendorBenchmark's analysis of 140+ Mimecast contracts documents this explicitly: when organizations credibly demonstrate they can move to Microsoft Defender for Office 365 Plan 2 (included in E5 they're already paying for), Mimecast accounts consistently improve renewal pricing by 10-15 points. The threat must be credible, which requires an internal analysis showing which Mimecast capabilities would be replaced by Microsoft native tools and which capabilities require retention.

For organizations that can live with Microsoft Defender's protection level, the migration to E5 with Defender Plan 2 eliminates the Mimecast cost entirely. For organizations that require Proofpoint-level BEC protection, the competitive quote still generates Mimecast negotiation leverage even if the migration is not actually planned.

The E3 to E5 caution: The \$2/user/month Defender Plan 1 add-on appears cheap, but the required E3 base subscription (\$36/user/month) means the true combined cost is \$38-\$41/user/month, higher than many organizations realize when they see the \$2/month add-on advertised. Organizations evaluating "free with Microsoft" email security should model the full E3/E5 base subscription cost alongside the Defender add-on, not the add-on price alone.

Platform Ratings at a Glance

Platform	G2	Capterra	Primary Market
Proofpoint Core	4.6 / 5 (582 reviews)	4.2 / 5 (45 reviews)	Enterprise (66.1% of reviews)
Mimecast Advanced	4.4 / 5 (315 reviews)	4.6 / 5 (30 reviews)	Mid-Market (68.4% of reviews)
Microsoft Defender O365	4.5 / 5 (288 reviews)	Strong	Mid-Market (37.5% of reviews)

Proofpoint's enterprise market concentration (66.1% of G2 reviews from enterprise) versus Mimecast's mid-market concentration (68.4%) reflects a clear market segmentation: Proofpoint serves the largest, most security-mature organizations; Mimecast serves mid-market organizations that want operational simplicity alongside security.

What Practitioners Report

Proofpoint: What Works

Proofpoint's threat intelligence depth is its most consistently validated advantage. The TAP (Targeted Attack Protection) system, URL Defense, and behavior-based detection are specifically cited by G2 reviewers as detecting threats that Microsoft Defender misses. For regulated industries, financial services, healthcare, and legal, where a single BEC incident can result in six-figure losses, the investment in Proofpoint's advanced detection is specifically justified in practitioner reviews.

G2's Anti-Phishing score comparison validates the performance differential: Proofpoint 9.1 versus Mimecast 8.8. In cybersecurity, 0.3 points on a 10-point scale represents a meaningful detection capability difference when the threat is sophisticated enough to evade basic filtering.

The DLP and compliance capabilities, integrated into Proofpoint's email security stack, are specifically cited as differentiating for organizations that need unified email security and data loss prevention without a separate DLP tool.

Proofpoint: What Doesn't Work

The 5% standard annual price uplift is documented as non-negotiable on year-over-year renewals. Multi-year commitments are the only documented path to eliminating or reducing the escalation clause. Organizations that sign annual Proofpoint contracts without a multi-year negotiation are committing to automatic cost increases indefinitely.

The admin interface is the most consistent practitioner complaint, specifically described as less intuitive than Microsoft Defender's unified portal. For security teams that manage Proofpoint alongside other tools, the administrative overhead is documented as higher than for Mimecast or Defender.

False positives require manual release. Proofpoint's aggressive filtering produces legitimate email quarantine that requires manual IT review. For organizations without a dedicated security operations team, this creates an ongoing administrative burden.

Hidden API costs. A Reddit practitioner documents a specific hidden cost: "I believe this threat intel dashboard is the module that includes a purchase dependency for the API that Proofpoint uses to share the latest IOCs with CrowdStrike, obviously neither vendor mentions this in presales." Third-party integrations require additional module purchases not disclosed during initial evaluation.

Mimecast: What Works

Email continuity is Mimecast's most distinctive feature, a cloud archive that maintains email access if the primary Microsoft 365 environment goes down. For organizations where email downtime creates immediate operational impact, this continuity layer addresses a risk that neither Proofpoint nor Defender replicates natively.

The bundled approach, security, archiving, continuity, and awareness training in one platform, reduces vendor proliferation for mid-market organizations that want fewer contracts to manage.

Mimecast added full API deployment in March 2026, expanding integrations across hundreds of security vendors, a move to compete with API-native alternatives like Abnormal Security.

Mimecast: What Doesn't Work

Renewal pricing is the defining Mimecast complaint. CostBench documents at least 4 hidden costs, and the Reddit community's characterization is consistent: "They will have their pound of flesh." The 25%+ annual renewal increases documented in independent analysis make Mimecast one

of the most aggressive renewal pricing vendors in enterprise software.

Data export fees and migration throttling at approximately 1TB/week create documented lock-in. Organizations that decide to leave Mimecast face a slow and expensive data export process that extends the effective switching cost well beyond the contract termination date.

Support accessibility. "Mimecast email support is useless, you need to call", documented across multiple Reddit threads and CostBench community reviews. For organizations that need rapid support response for email security incidents, this limitation is operationally significant.

The M365 E5 pressure. VendorBenchmark's analysis identifies Microsoft 365 E5 migration as Mimecast's "single largest commercial pressure." The threat of retiring Mimecast for Microsoft Defender Plan 2 (included in E5) generates consistent renewal discounts, which implies Mimecast's standard renewal pricing already embeds significant margin above the walk-away point.

Microsoft Defender for Office 365: What Works

Zero incremental cost for E5 customers is the primary advantage, and it is significant. For organizations already paying \$57/user/month for M365 E5, Defender Plan 2's anti-phishing, attack simulation training, and threat intelligence add no additional line item.

The unified Microsoft 365 Defender portal, covering email security alongside endpoint, identity, and cloud security, simplifies administration for organizations running a Microsoft-centric security stack. G2 reviewers specifically cite the integration with Office 365 as eliminating the need for additional tools.

Microsoft Defender for Office 365: What Doesn't Work

Not competitive with Proofpoint for BEC detection or targeted attack protection.

TechnologyMatch's independent comparison is explicit: "It is not competitive with Proofpoint or Abnormal for BEC detection or targeted attack protection." For organizations in high-risk BEC environments, financial services, legal, executive communications, Defender Plan 2 may not provide sufficient advanced protection.

The E3 to E5 hidden cost. Defender Plan 1 at \$2/user/month looks inexpensive until the required M365 E3 base subscription (\$36/user/month) is included. The true combined cost of \$38-\$41/user/month is not the \$2/month figure that "free with Microsoft" implies.

Pricing Reality (June 2026)

Proofpoint

Plan	Price	Notes
Essentials Business	\$3.03/user/month	SMB, basic protection
Essentials Business+	\$3.36/user/month	Enhanced features
Essentials Professional	\$5.86/user/month	DLP, archiving, unlimited
Enterprise (TAP)	\$30-\$50/user/year	Custom enterprise; advanced threat

Plan	Price	Notes
Annual uplift	5% standard	Negotiable only with multi-year

Negotiation levers: Competitive quotes from Mimecast, Abnormal, or Avanan produce 10%-20% discounts. Multi-year commitments (2-3 years) eliminate or reduce the 5% annual uplift.

Mimecast

Plan	Price	Notes
S1 Email Security Essentials	\$18-\$28/user/year	Entry-level
S2 Advanced	\$28-\$42/user/year	Standard enterprise
S3 Comprehensive	\$42-\$55/user/year	Full bundle
Email Archiving	\$8-\$18/user/year + storage overage	Separate add-on

Negotiation lever: Credible Microsoft Defender E5 migration threat produces 10-15 point renewal improvement consistently per VendorBenchmark's 140+ contract analysis.

Microsoft Defender for Office 365

Plan	Price	M365 Base Required	True Combined Cost
Plan 1	\$2/user/month	E3 (\$36/user/month)	\$38/user/month
Plan 2	\$5/user/month	E3 (\$36/user/month)	\$41/user/month
Included in E5	\$0 additional	E5 (\$57/user/month)	\$57/user/month (all E5 features)

The E5 math: For organizations that need E5 features beyond email security (Defender for Endpoint, Purview compliance, Entra ID P2), E5 at \$57/user produces a bundled cost that makes Defender email security effectively free. For organizations that don't need other E5 features, E5 solely for Defender email security is typically more expensive than adding Mimecast to E3.

The Decision Framework

Choose Proofpoint if:

- Your organization is a large enterprise with a dedicated security operations team and BEC is a primary threat vector
- Regulated industry (financial services, healthcare, legal) where advanced threat detection and compliance capabilities are required
- You have negotiated a multi-year commitment to eliminate the 5% standard annual uplift
- You have requested and received documentation of all API and integration module costs before signing
- You are using competitive quotes from Mimecast, Abnormal, or Avanan as negotiation leverage

Choose Mimecast if:

- Email continuity, the cloud archive that maintains access if M365 goes down, is a documented business requirement
- Your organization is mid-market (51-1,000 employees) and values operational simplicity alongside security
- You have explicitly modeled Microsoft Defender E5 as a renewal alternative and used it as negotiation leverage
- You have obtained renewal pricing before your contract expires, not during the renewal window when leverage is lowest
- You have documented and budgeted for data export fees and migration costs if you ever plan to leave

Choose Microsoft Defender for Office 365 if:

- Your organization is already on M365 E5, where Defender Plan 2 is included at zero incremental cost
- Your threat environment is moderate and Defender's protection level is sufficient based on your security team's assessment
- You are using the E5 migration threat as Mimecast renewal leverage whether or not you actually plan to migrate
- You have explicitly assessed whether Defender's BEC detection capability is sufficient for your specific threat profile, independent analysis rates it not competitive with Proofpoint for targeted attack environments

The pre-renewal checklist for Mimecast specifically:

1. Model Microsoft Defender for Office 365 Plan 2 (E5 included) against your current Mimecast capabilities, identify what Mimecast provides that Defender does not
2. Present the E5 migration analysis to your Mimecast account team before entering renewal negotiations
3. Obtain the renewal quote at least 90 days before contract expiration, leverage drops at 30 days
4. Request data export pricing and timeline explicitly before signing any renewal, document the exit cost
5. Benchmark your renewal quote against VendorBenchmark's documented discount ranges for comparable contract sizes

The Bottom Line

Email security is one of the highest-ROI security investments available: a single prevented BEC incident at a \$50,000 median loss pays for Proofpoint's annual cost for a 100-person organization. The platform decision should be made on threat environment and detection capability first, cost second.

Proofpoint is the most appropriate choice for large enterprises with complex threat environments where BEC detection capability, compliance depth, and advanced threat intelligence justify the cost premium over Microsoft Defender. Its 5% annual uplift and admin interface complexity are real

limitations that multi-year negotiation and dedicated security staff mitigate.

Mimecast is the most appropriate choice for mid-market organizations that want email security, archiving, and continuity in one platform. Its renewal pricing practices are the most documented commercial risk in enterprise email security. The Microsoft Defender E5 migration threat is the most effective negotiation lever for any Mimecast renewal.

Microsoft Defender for Office 365 is the most appropriate starting point for organizations already on E5, where Plan 2 is included at zero additional cost. It is not appropriate as a primary replacement for Proofpoint in high-risk BEC environments. It is the most effective Mimecast renewal negotiation tool regardless of whether migration is actually planned.

The finding that belongs in every Mimecast renewal: VendorBenchmark's analysis of 140+ contracts documents 10-15 point renewal improvement when organizations credibly position Microsoft Defender E5 as a migration alternative. The improvement is consistent. The threat must be credible. Model the E5 migration before your next Mimecast renewal call.