Integration of MS Outlook in SuSE Linux Openexchange Server

SuSE

1 Introduction

This document describes the functionalities of Outlook clients in connection with SuSE Linux Openexchange Server as provided by the iSLOX module.

The description mainly focuses on the basic features Outlook provides in connection with MS Exchange.

Thus, both end customers as well as partners can obtain an overview of the functionalities Outlook will soon provide in connection with SuSE Linux Openexchange Server with the iSLOX module.

2 Purpose of iSLOX

The purpose of this connector is to be able to use Outlook as a full-featured client for SuSE Linux Openexchange Server. For users, the migration from Microsoft Exchange Server to SuSE Linux Openexchange Server should be as smooth as possible. This means that users should be able to use the usual Outlook functions without being confronted with an entirely new user interface. New SLOX-specific functions are implemented in a way that gives users the accustomed Windows usability.

Only functions that cannot be mapped without MS Exchange Server and SLOX-specific functions are modified.

On the client side, the iSLOX connector merely generates a minor load, thus enabling concurrent operation of other applications such as the Office products.

The minimum requirement is the connection of the number of clients that Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 can administer in one instance.

The iSLOX connector will be compatible with all Outlook clients starting from Outlook 98.

Since many companies also use clients on which Outlook is not available and more and more employees need remote access to the groupware information and mail by way of a browser, SLOX will also support parallel operation of Outlook and the proven SLOX web interface.

The iSLOX module will be made available to customers without any surcharge within the scope of the SLOX product.

3 Target Group

Today, Outlook is a widely used client that enjoys a high level of user acceptance in the field of messaging and groupware. On the other hand, the deployment of Exchange together with Outlook can be quite costly, especially if a migration from Exchange 5.5 to Exchange 2000/2003 (introduction of Active Directory) is necessary. Moreover, for the sake of security and stability, IT decision makers increasingly favor Linux-based applications on the server.

The functionalities provided by the iSLOX connector address medium-sized enterprises (10 to 2,000 users) that want to retain Outlook as a client but prefer a server running a Linux-based system with professional support and maintenance.

4 Concept

The connection of the Outlook clients is implemented on the basis of a WebDav/XML interface and enables real-time availability of the data.

It provides all relevant information available on the SLOX server system and also supports SLOX-specific functionalities such as the conflict management of the appointment scheduler.

On the Outlook side, the functionalities are implemented by way of a MAPI message store provider, transport, address, and hook provider. These providers exchange the data with the SLOX server via the WebDAV interface and LDAP and ensure the required object mapping from Outlook to SLOX and vice versa.

Conceptually, the system is based on the permission concept of SLOX (various permissions are assigned on the object level), even if Outlook is used.

However, to ensure optimum integration of Outlook, "Public Folders" which can be assigned permissions like in Outlook/Exchange are implemented on the SLOX side. On the folder level, object templates are used to predefine permissons for the creation of objects. Additionally, these permissions can be modified on the object level.

The "Public Folder" concept is also integrated in the web interface, thus enabling full coexistence of the web interface and Outlook as user front-end.

Furthermore, a distinct delete permission is introduced in SLOX. Thus, the delete permission can be assigned to all persons with write permissions or limited to the owner. In this way, the compatibility with Outlook is improved, which greatly facilitates the migration from MS Exchange to SLOX.

Apart from the real-time connection of the outlook clients to the SLOX server, the offline functionality with Outlook will also be supported (by the end of 2003, not in the first version in October 2003).

5 Function Scope in Version 4.1 (October 2003)

5.1 "Public Folders"

Like Outlook folders, "Public Folders" can only contain elements of a specific format. In the first version, the following folder types are supported: calendar/appointment folders, task folders, and contact folders. (IMAP e-mail folders are already supported in the current version). Journal folders and notes folders are not supported.

The connection makes changes to objects in the *Public Folders* available to users in real time.

Folder permissions can be assigned both on the Outlook folder level and in the SLOX web interface.

Other supported functions:

- Mapping of public folders with the help of the MAPI storage provider in Outlook
- Assignment of folder permissions for selected persons
- Mapping of the permission concept of SuSE Linux Openexchange Server
- Nesting of various object types (e.g., task or appointment folder under a contact folder)
- Creating, editing, moving, deleting folders

On the Outlook side, the assignment of permissions for objects will initially be realized exclusively by way of the folder permissions.

In a version that will be released in late 2003, this functionality will be expanded to enable the assignment of other permissions on the object level in the Outlook client. For this purpose, a special SLOX form will be inserted in which the author of an object can do things such as granting participants of an appointment write permission in addition to the read permission.

5.2 Calendar

As usual, Appointments can be created in Outlook for individual users as well as for groups. The free/busy functionality is supported, enabling an availability check. Resources can also be checked and booked. Appointment series as well as the acceptance and rejection of appointments are supported.

An additional feature is the SLOX-specific conflict management which actively issues notifications whenever appointments overlap.

In a later version, the Outlook functionality will be expanded by an appointment query concept (such as the one used in the web interface) using a special form.

5.3 Contacts

The permission-specific access to all contacts in SLOX is possible from Outlook. By means of the *Public Folders*, contacts can be organized in various virtual address books with diverse access permissions.

5.4 Tasks

Tasks are implemented as in Outlook with Exchange:

Tasks primarily serve the personal work organization. For this reason, only the creation of "Personal Tasks" is supported. The allocation of tasks to projects like in SLOX is not supported, as this module does not exist in Outlook. Nevertheless, a project-specific task organization can be improvised by allocating tasks to a project folder (Public Folder). The tasks that are placed in such folders can then viewed by other persons who have access to the project folder. Series of tasks are not supported, as they do not suit the task concept of SLOX.

5.5 What Does Version 4.1 (October 2003) Still Lack?

- Vacation notification on the server side (will be implemented in late 2003/early 2004)
- Configuration of mail filter rules on the server side from Outlook by means of a rule wizard (will be implemented in late 2003/early 2004)
- IMAP support for Outlook 2000 (will be implemented in late 2003)
- Offline functionality with synchronization rules (will be implemented in late 2003/early 2004)
- Other SLOX-specific functions such as appointment queries with free appointment proposals generated by SLOX (will be implemented in Q1 2004)
- Delegating tasks to other persons and groups (will be implemented in Q1 2004)
- Task series (currently not planned)

6 SLOX Interface in Version 4.1 (October 2003)

The connection of the Outlook clients is realized on the basis of a WebDav/XML interface. Thus, a versatile, efficient interface is made available for all third-party integrators.

This interface also exists for the documents in SLOX. Thus, the documents can be accessed with external applications and users can easily access SLOX folders and documents directly from standard office applications such as MS Office, OpenOffice.org, or StarOffice.

The SLOX-specific folder and document permissions are applied consistently:

- Subfolders and documents are saved or newly created with the permissions of the respective parent folders.
- When a document that already exists with the same file name is saved anew, a new version is generated automatically.
- The permission to delete document and folders is taken into consideration as defined in SLOX.