GFI Archiver

In this review we will look at the latest version of GFI Archiver and how it can help organizations archive messaging data and much more.

By Nuno Mota

Product Homepage: **click here**

Free Trial: **click here**

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Introduction

GFI Software is an American developer of IT solutions founded in 1992. Its products range from network performance to patch management, from auditing to security scanning, and more.

In this review, we focus our attention on **GFI Archiver** (v14.2, build 20190521), a software solution that enables organizations to archive and manage their email, calendar and file history in one place and provides easy access to the data when it is needed. It starts by being an email archiving solution that can archive all internal and external emails into a central Archive Store, but it does much more than that as we will see.

Why would an organization use GFI Archiver, or any archiving solution for that matter? Well, there are a variety of reasons, with two common ones being:

- Compliance reasons. GFI Archiver allows organizations to securely manage and access their electronic communications history, including emails, attachments, files, calendar entries, faxes, SMS, and voice messages. Archiving these items in their original state in a central, tamper-proof store helps minimize legal risk by providing compliance and eDiscovery capabilities;

- Improve email performance and possibly save money. Archiving electronic communications separately from applications such as Exchange Server, can help save active server space and improving performance. GFI Archiver uses single-instance storage to store a single copy of a multi-recipient email and its attachments, rather than multiple copies of the same email. On top of that, it compresses (and decompresses) email attachments in real time to make better use of storage resources.

But there are other benefits. For example, GFI Archiver's MailInsights can generate PDF reports to help identify risk and manage email productivity through actionable information found in their email history.

GFI Archiver operations can be classified in three stages:

1. Emails are retrieved from the mail server automatically using journaling, or manually from an Outlook client;

2. Those emails are archived in a *GFI Archive Store*;

3. Users can browse and analyze archived emails through a web interface, mobile, or Outlook client.

Let's start by checking what is required to run GFI Archiver.

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01 Requirements and Installation

To run GFI Archiver, we need a Windows server running Windows Small Business Server 2011, or Windows Server 2008 R2 or above, all the way to Windows Server 2019. Servers running on VMware or Hyper-V are fully supported.

In terms of mail servers, GFI Archiver can be installed directly on an Exchange server, but that is only recommended for test/dev environments. The following are all supported mail servers:

- Microsoft Exchange 2007 or later;
- Office 365 (Exchange Online);
- Mail servers supporting IMAP;
- Kerio Connect;
- Google Apps for Business.

Most deployments will use a Microsoft SQL Server (2005 or later) database to store archive data. SQL Express is also fully supported but it is not included. For evaluation purposes, GFI Archiver includes a free database called *Firebird*.

Just like many other GFI products, installing GFI Archiver could not be easier. It follows the traditional wizard-based installation and starts by checking for any required components missing, making it easy to install them before proceeding:
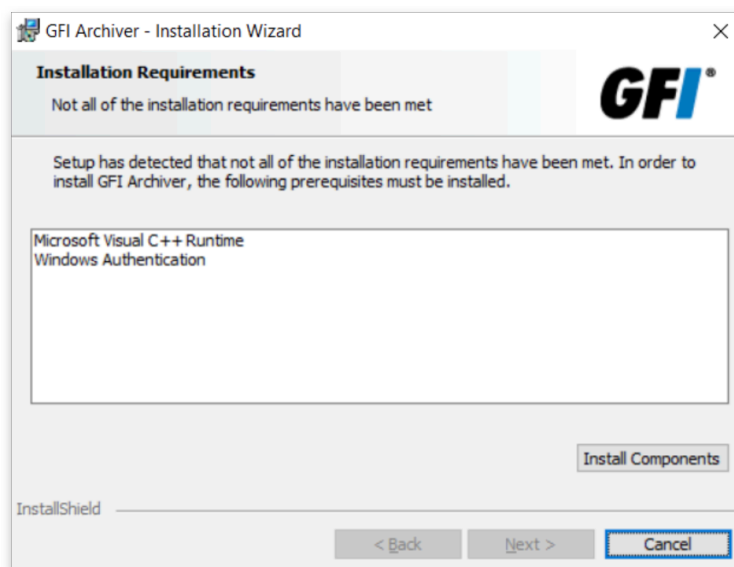
A decision we need to make during installation is choosing the user directory service to use. GFI Archiver supports Microsoft Active Directory (AD) and GFI Directory services. It is recommended to use AD whenever possible, since user management will be centralized in the existing AD.
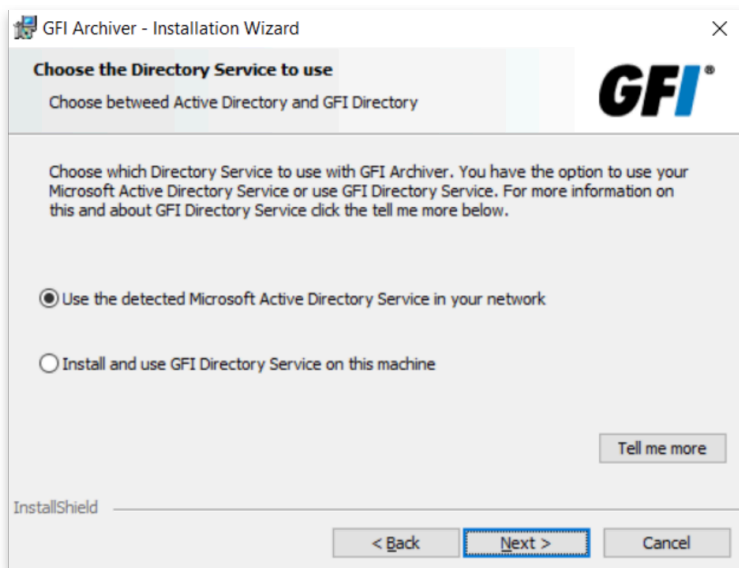

Once GFI Archiver is successfully installed, the post install wizard starts, which helps us setting up GFI Archiver:
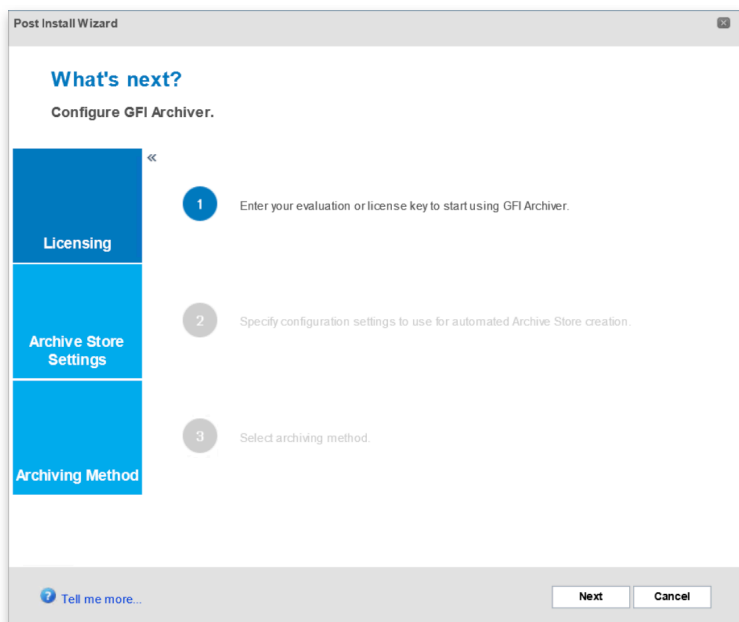
Here, steps 2 and 3 are the most important ones. **Archive Store Settings** allows us to configure which type of database to use:
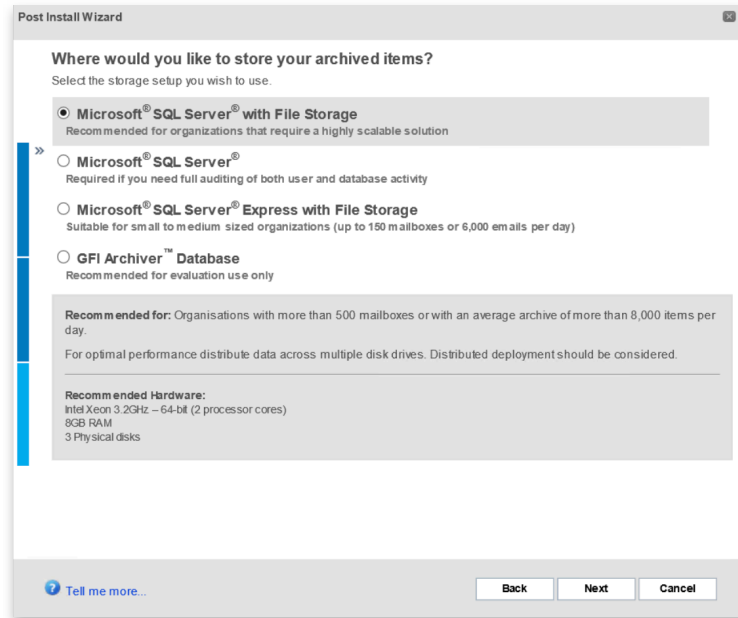
In step 3 we configure the **Archiving Method** to define how GFI Archiver collects items for storage in the archive stores. This method will depend on the infrastructure and organization

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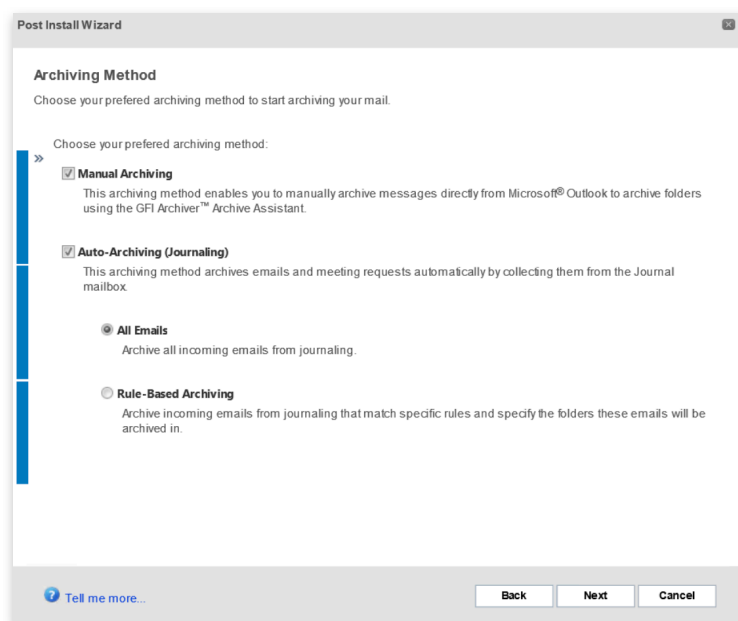
- **Manual archiving** lets users decide which emails to archive. Users can manually archive a single email or a whole folder. This archiving method does not require Exchange, which means that any business using Outlook can manually archive emails irrespective of where their email is hosted;

- **All Emails** uses the journaling feature of Exchange. Journaled emails are copied (and deleted from Exchange if desired) by GFI Archiver and archived. GFI Archiver can also poll email from any mail server that supports IMAP and Active Directory;

- **Rule-Based Archiving** is suitable for organizations that do not want to archive everything. Using this option, administrators can selectively archive email based on specific criteria.

Next, we need to tell GFI Archiver which journaling mailbox(es) to archive emails from or let it automatically create one:

Once this is done, and if we let it create a journaling mailbox, it will appear in the **mailboxes** list:
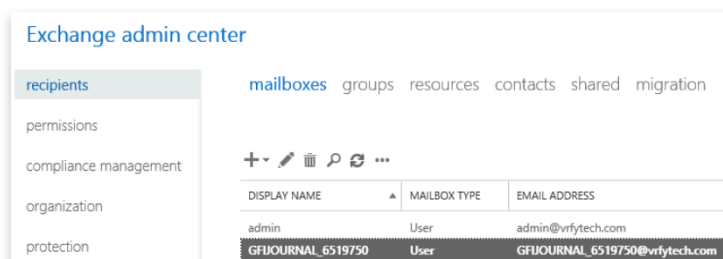
Additionally, the database where it was created (chosen by us) will be automatically configured to journal everything since we selected the option to archive all emails:
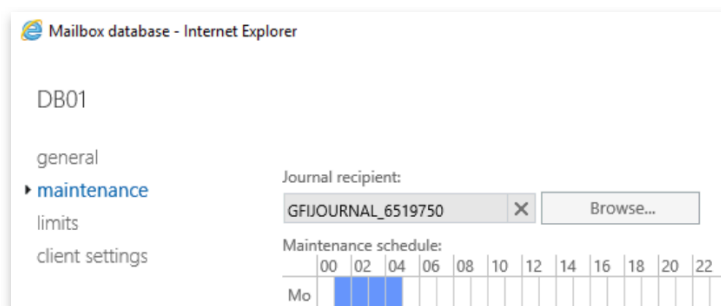
02 Administration

By this stage, GFI Archiver has been installed and an initial configuration performed. To open its management console, we use the GFI Archiver icon on our desktop/start menu, or we browse to the URL chosen during installation in the form of *http://<GFI Archiver hostname>/<GFI Archiver virtual folder name>:*
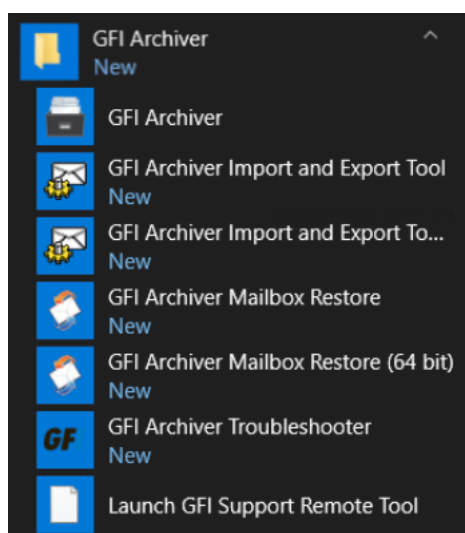
Once logged in, we are taken to the Home tab. Its graphical and statistical information provides a real-time overview of the general operational parameters of GFI Archiver, and it helps identify any issues:

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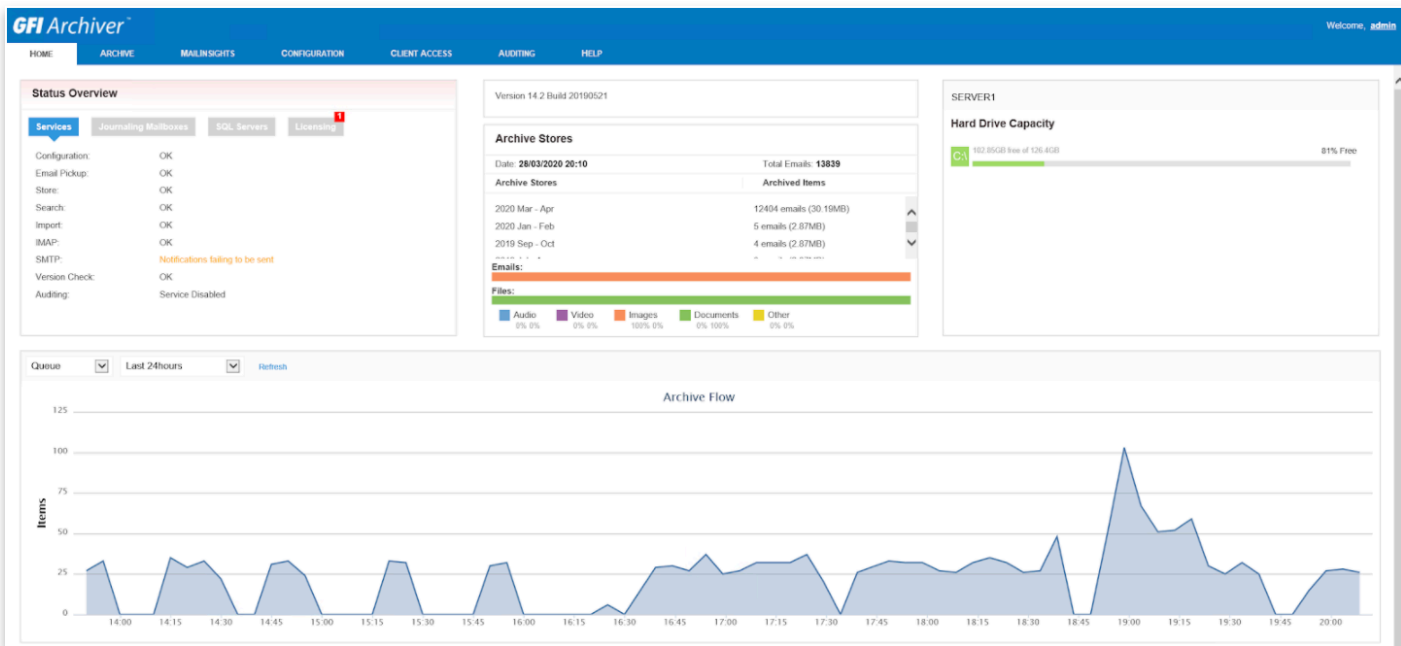
In this pane we can see information such as any possible issues related to various components of GFI Archiver, how much disk space we have free on the GFI Archiver server, information about the total number of emails archived and the number of Archive Stores used, a graphical overview of the quantity of emails being archived, and information about GFI Archiver events (if any).

CONFIGURATION
The *Configuration* tab enables us to configure every aspect of GFI Archiver:

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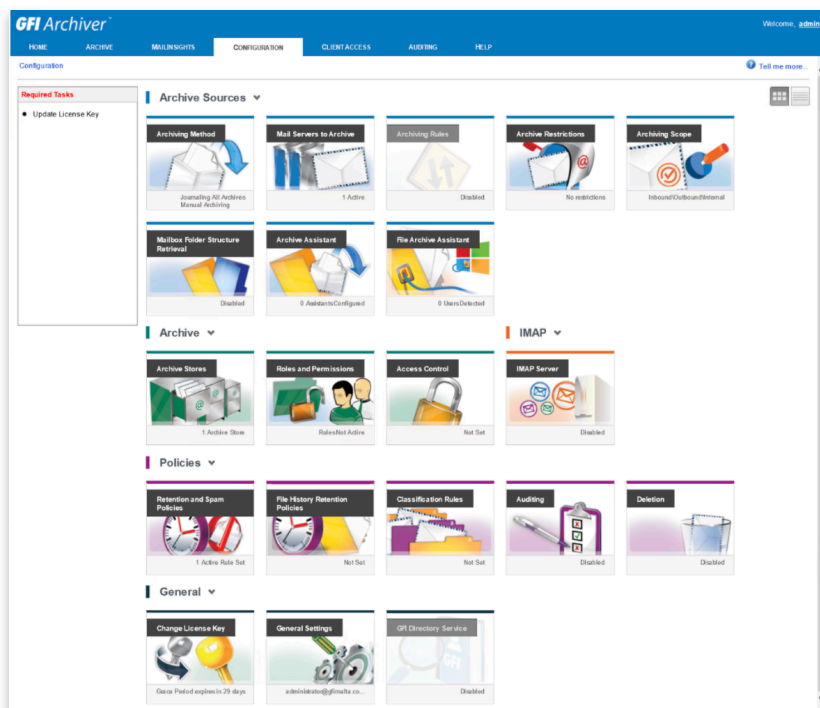
Unfortunately, it is not possible to cover everything in this review, so here is a brief description of some of these options.

Archive Sources

- **Archiving Method** shows the Archiving Method currently enabled (what we configured in the post-installation wizard);

- **Mail Servers to Archive** shows all the journal mailboxes configured for archiving. Configuring GFI Archiver to connect to Office 365 is straightforward and can be done using Exchange Web Services (EWS). Although we can also use IMAP, EWS with Exchange Online is no longer supported, so hopefully GFI Archiver will be updated in a future release to support Graph API.

- **Archiving Rules**, when enabled, allows us to configure rules that determine what gets archived and what does not;

- **Archive Restrictions** allows us to exclude certain mailboxes from archiving while including specific ones:

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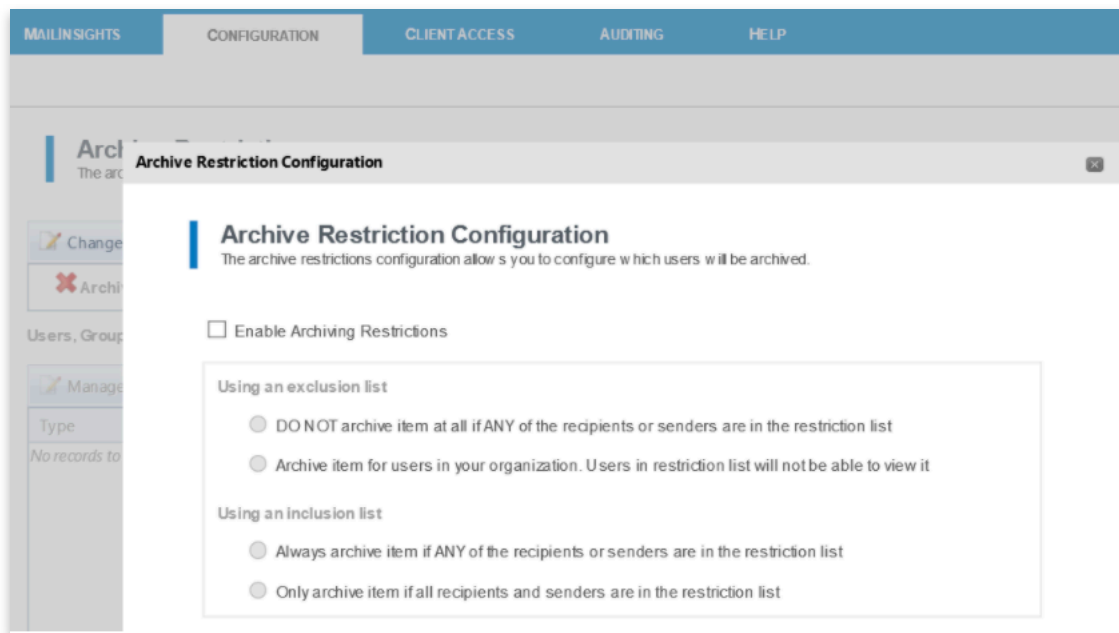
- **Archiving Scope** defines whether incoming, outgoing, or internal emails (or a combination) are archived:

- **Mailbox Folder Structure Retrieval** enables the replication of the folder structure of the mailboxes within Exchange with GFI Archiver.

Archive

- **Archiving Stores** shows the number of Archive Stores configured and in use, as well as their database and indexing status:

- **Access Control** defines who has access to which mailboxes. For example, a manager might be allowed to browse and search through the archived emails of all its team members.

Policies

- **Retention and Spam policies** define the lifetime of an archive email within GFI Archiver. Emails matching specific criteria can be deleted immediately or after a specific period of time. For example, by default GFI Archiver creates a retention policy to not retain any probing emails from Exchange *Managed Availability*:

- **File History Retention Policies** define the length of time that an archived version of a file is retained in the Archive Store before it is deleted:
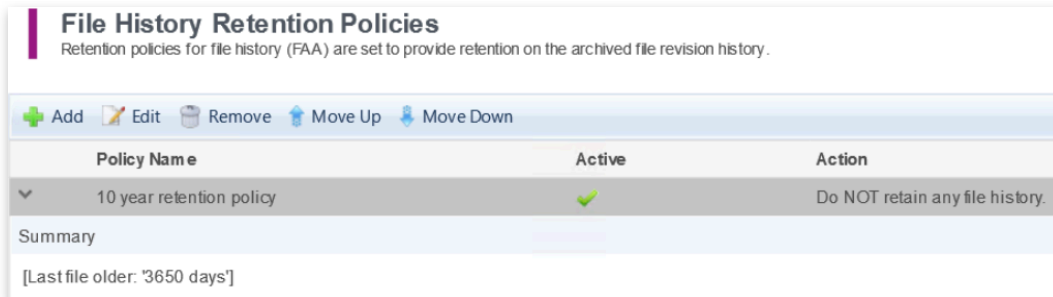
- **Classification Rules** automate the labeling of emails through policies, useful for legal reasons for example.

- **Auditing** shows and defines whether GFI Archiver Auditing is switched on or not. GFI Archiver database activity auditing uses the tracing capabilities of SQL Server to record all activity affecting the archive databases. User interaction through the web interface is also audited.

ARCHIVE

In the *Archive tab* we can view archived items for all the mailboxes in the environment:
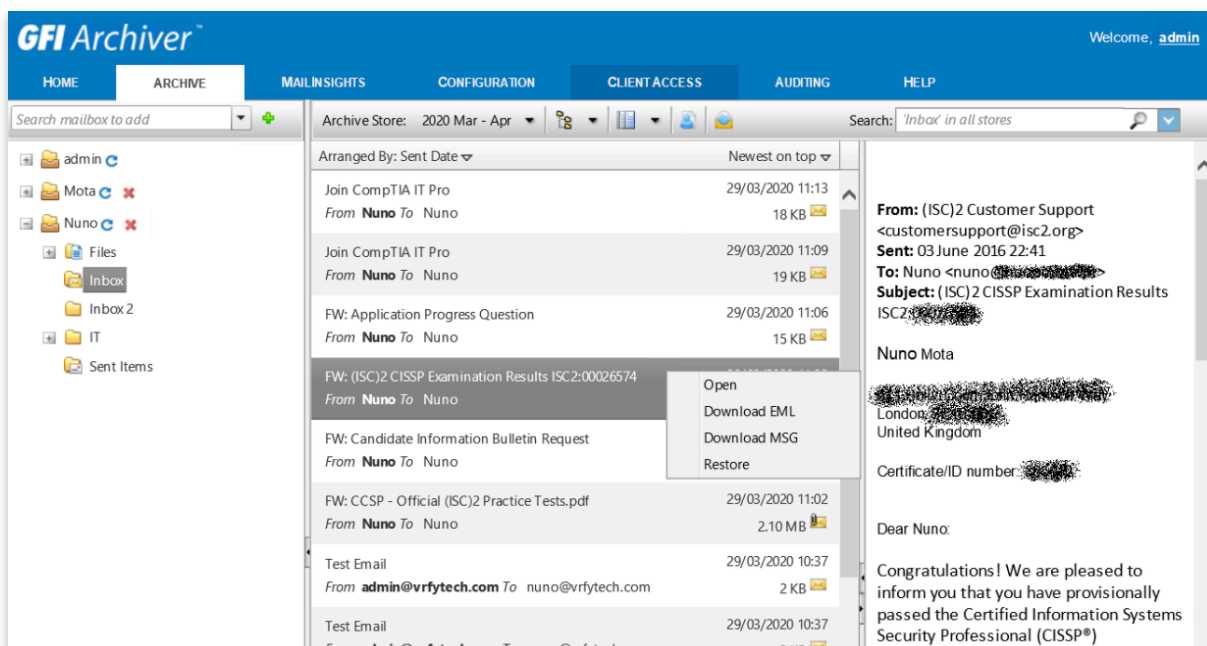
Users have access to the same *Archive* console, limited to their own archive of course.

We can perform several actions here, such as preview an email, delete emails from the archive (if the option has been enabled), switch between email conversations and calendar items, or restoring an item.

To view an archived email, we can also double click it to view it in a new window:
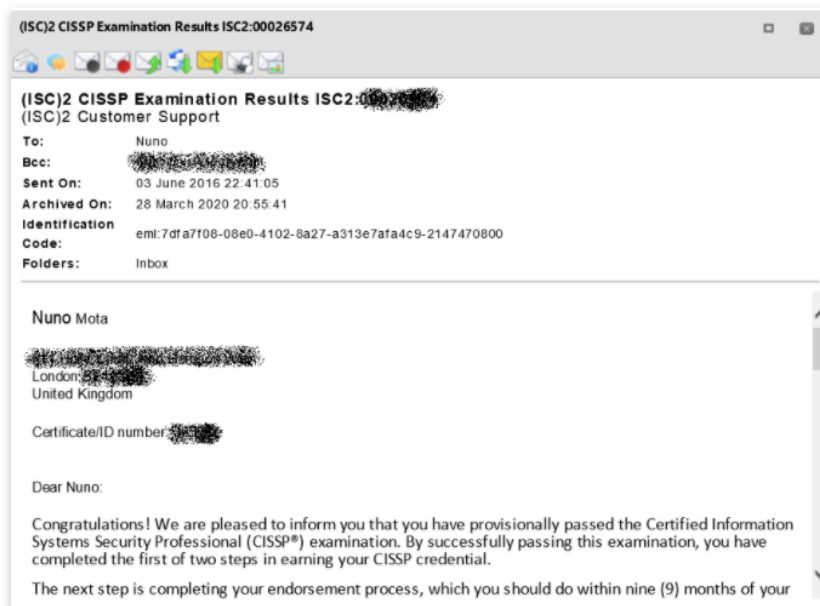

Depending on the type of archived item selected, we can view the item's header, view the conversation thread, edit its labels which allows organizations to categorize items (useful for legal searches for example), save the email to EML or MSG format, download the calendar item, print it and more. From this window we can also easily restore the item to a specific mailbox or forward a copy to an email address:
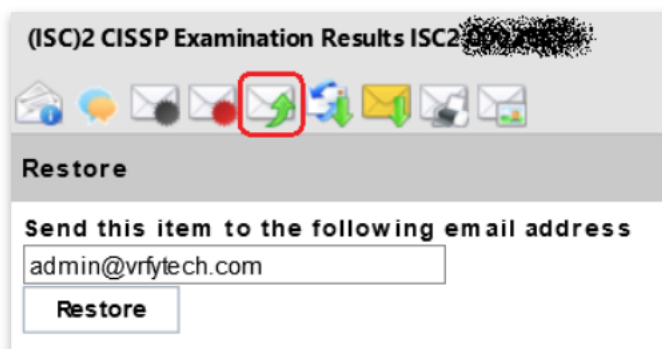
There is also a file and calendar view:
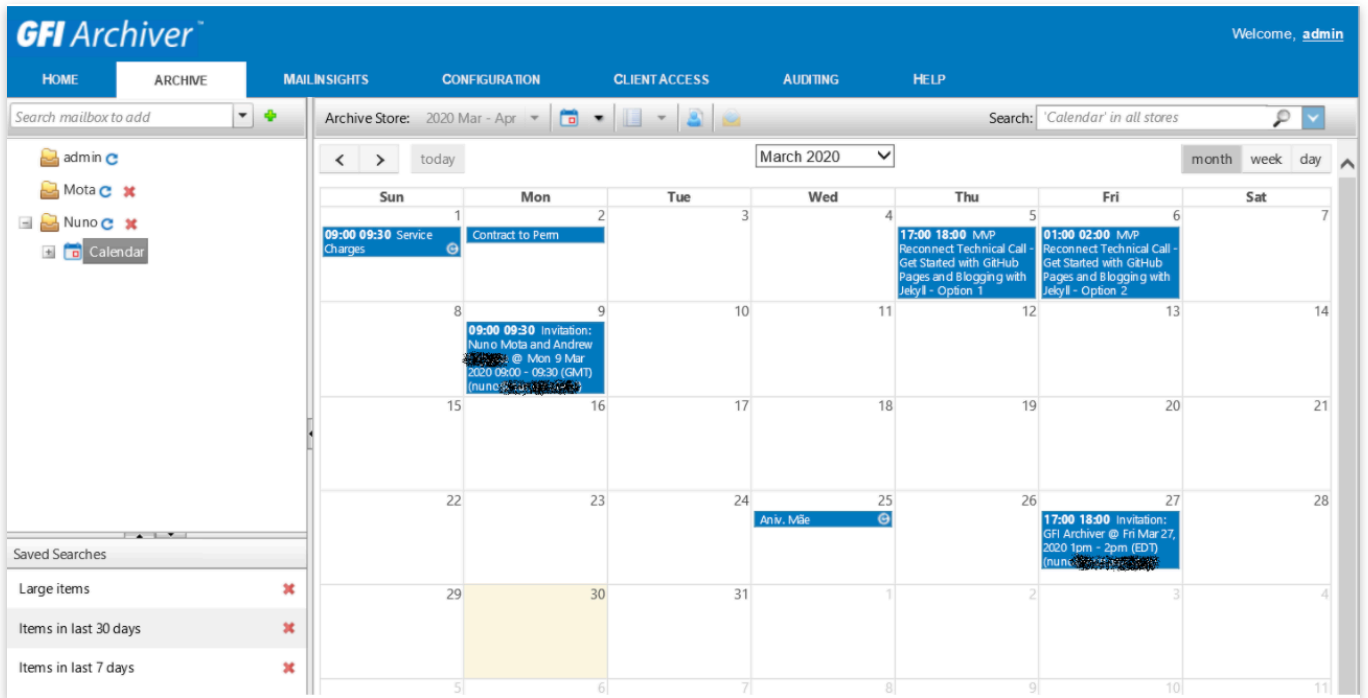
It is easy to search archived items (including calendar items). GFI Archiver queries its email index and retrieves any matching item with its respective attachment:
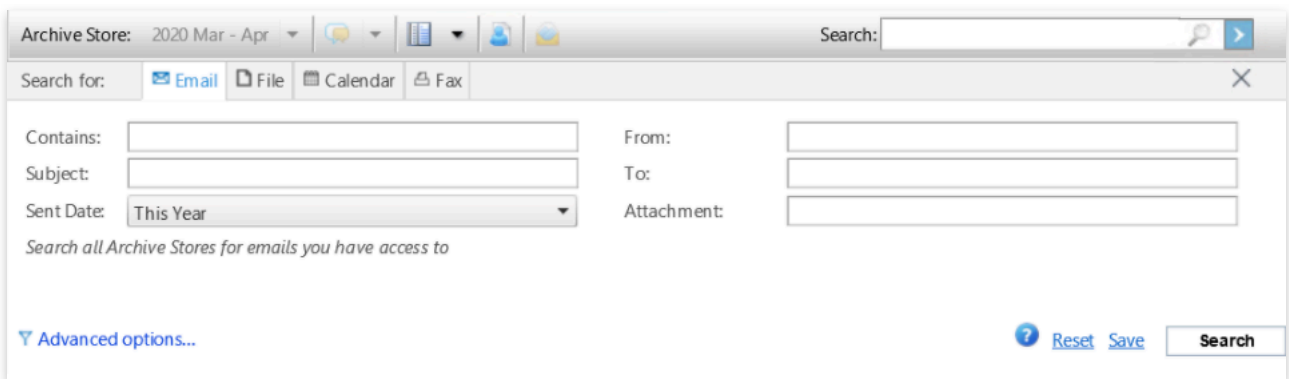
Alternatively, we can use the *Advanced Search* to use a wider range of search criteria when searching for archived items:
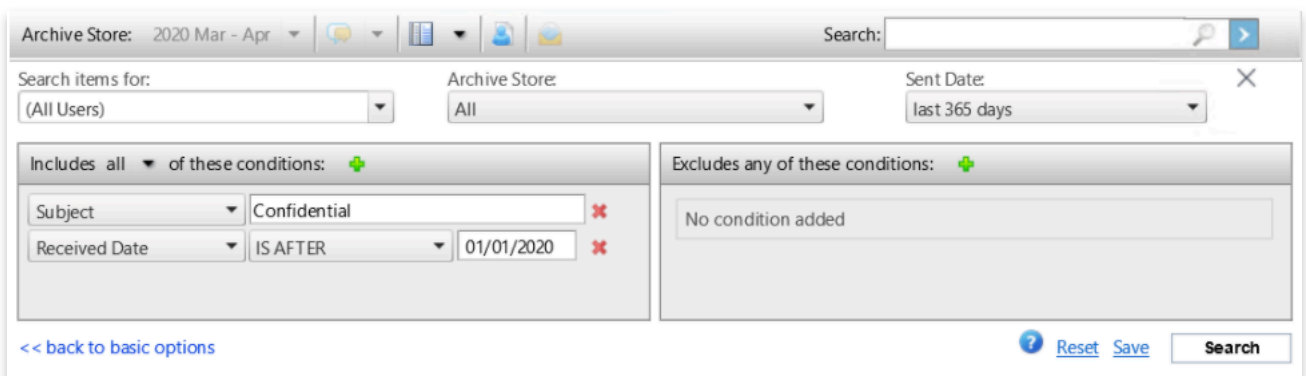
We can also search and view emails (including attachments) using a smartphone!
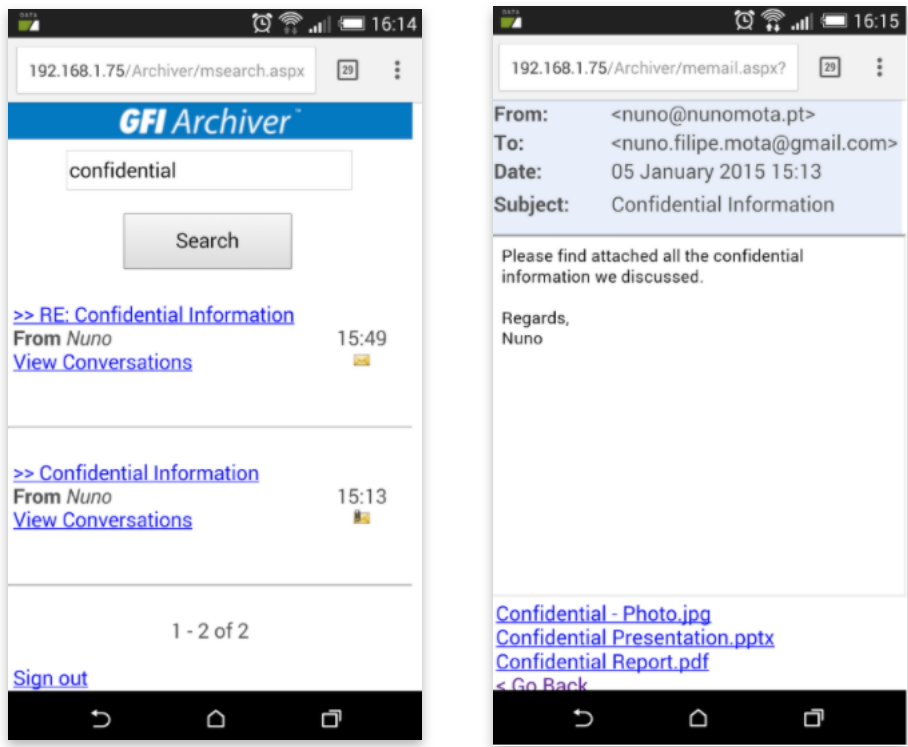
03 Archiving Data

By now we have Exchange journaling every email in our Exchange environment and GFI Archiver archiving those same emails. But what about all those emails sent/received before we deployed GFI Archiver? There are several ways of ingesting historic data.

The first option is to use the **File Archive Assistant** which enables users to sync files between their computer and GFI Archiver. It can be used in 2 ways: archive files manually from any location on the computer using the new context menu. This is done by right-clicking on any folder, file, selection of folders or a selection of files and clicking *Archive files:*

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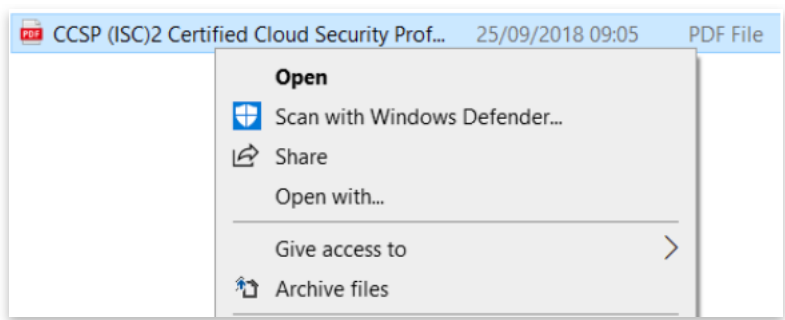
Or use a *Synchronized Folder* to automatically archive files. Any file saved in this folder (or folders) is automatically uploaded to GFI Archiver.
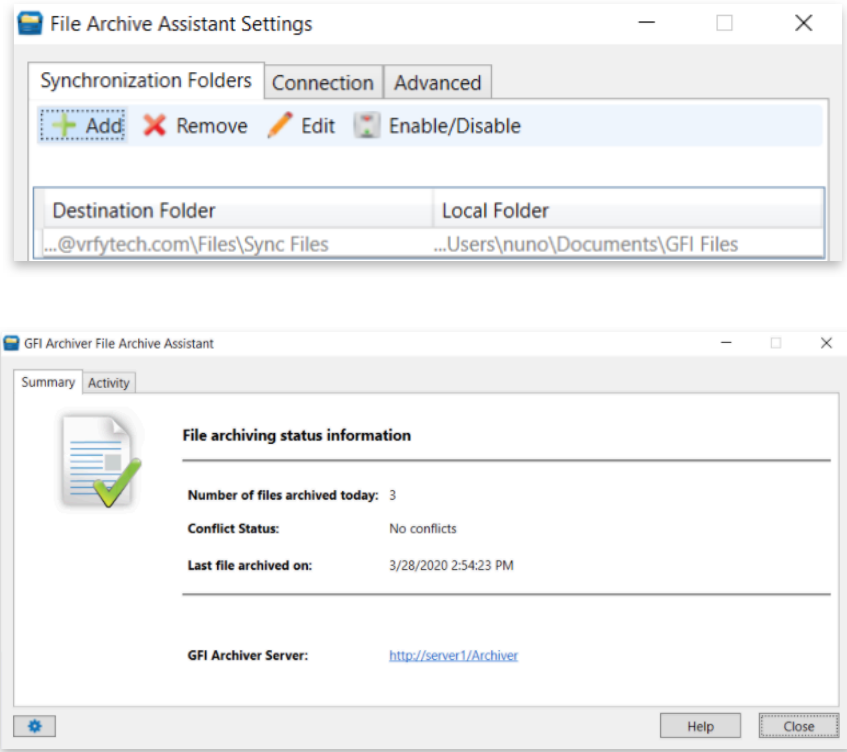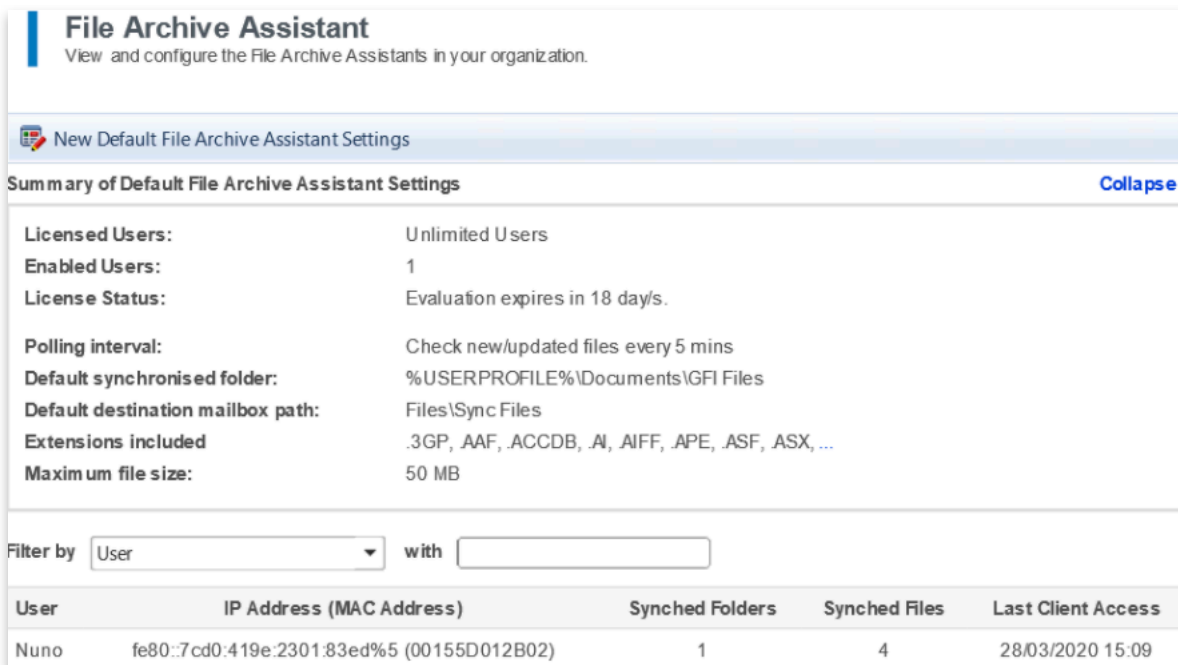

All files archived are accessible by users via the GFI Archiver Web Interface that users have access to:
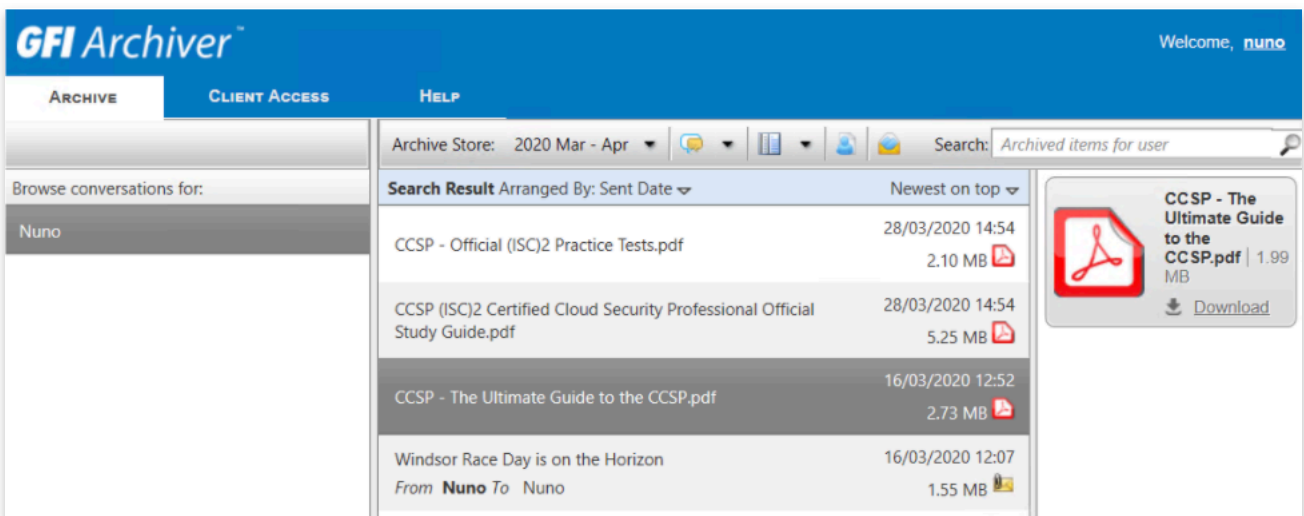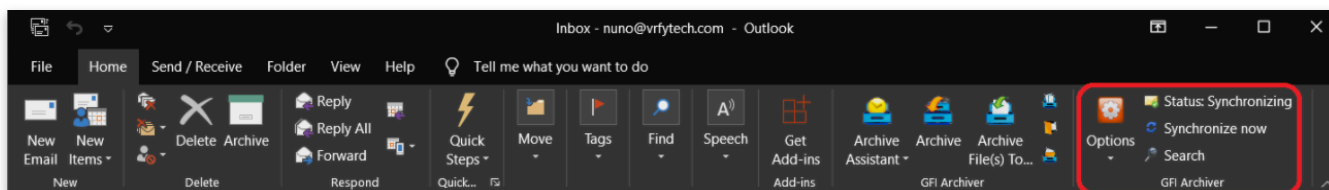
Settings such as synchronisation frequency, maximum file size, and more, can all be configured from the admin console:


A second method of archiving data that can be made available to users is **Outlook Connector**, which allows the archive of old emails (those that weren't archived through Journaling, for example) from within Outlook:


Synchronization with GFI Archiver takes place automatically at a specified time interval, or manually using the Outlook Connector status toolbar:

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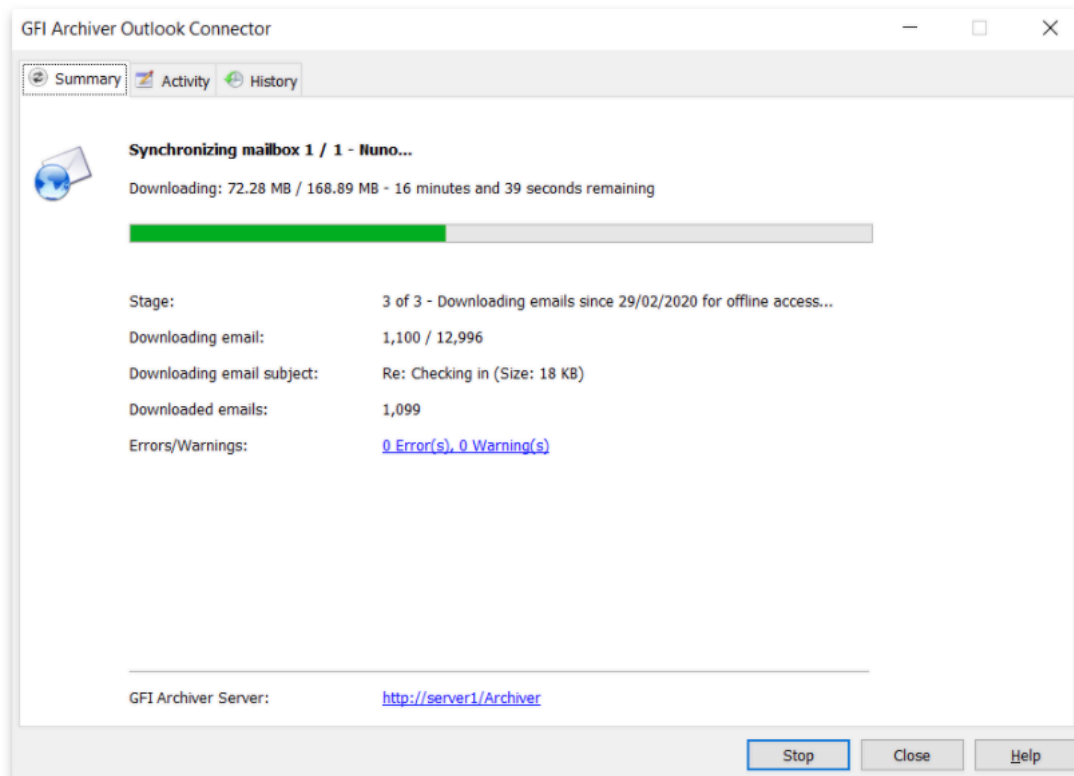
Outlook Connector adds the folder GFI Archiver *Mailbox* to the Outlook folder list, allowing users to see the email messages archived by GFI Archiver. Archived emails are displayed in an organized folder structure, identical to that in the user's mailbox:
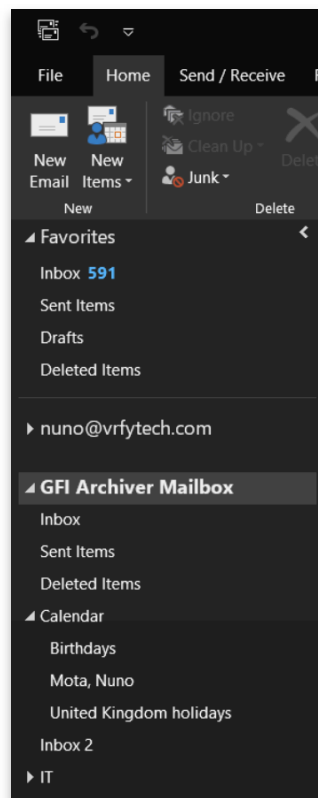
A third option available to users is the **Archive Assistant**, which enables users to manually archive emails, calendar items and files (such as documents or images) from Outlook (as long as admins have allowed users to manually archive items):
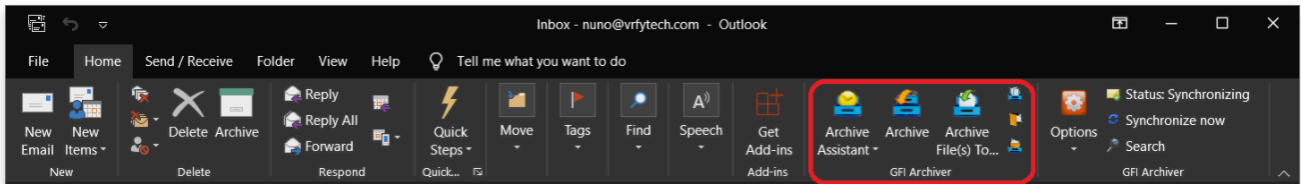

From within Outlook, a user can select an email, a group of emails, calendar item(s) or a folder, and use the archive buttons in the toolbar (above) that is installed when Archive Assistant is deployed. The Archive Assistant then initiates a request to synchronize the selected items with GFI Archiver:
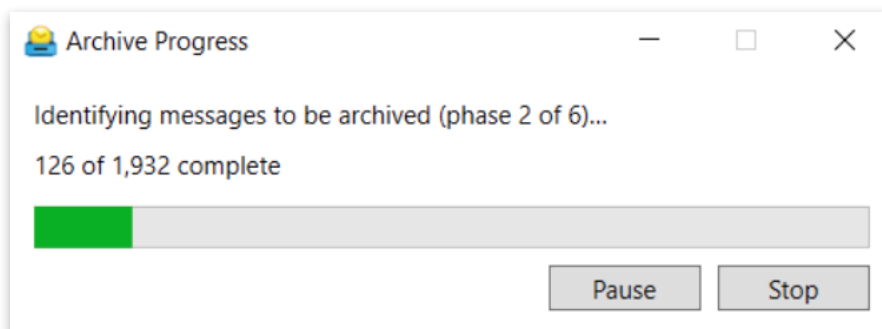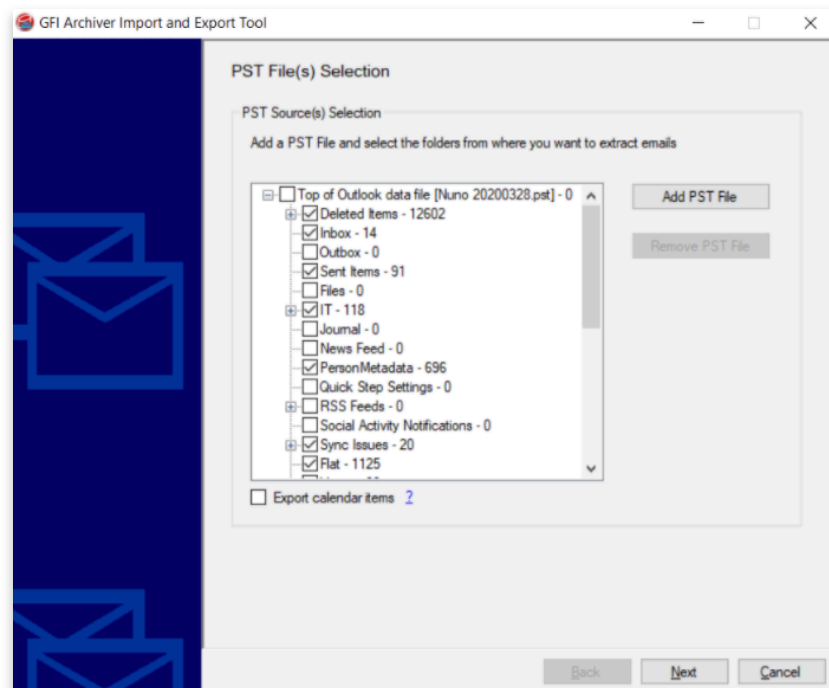

Users can also right-click a folder, and select *Archive Outlook Folder*:
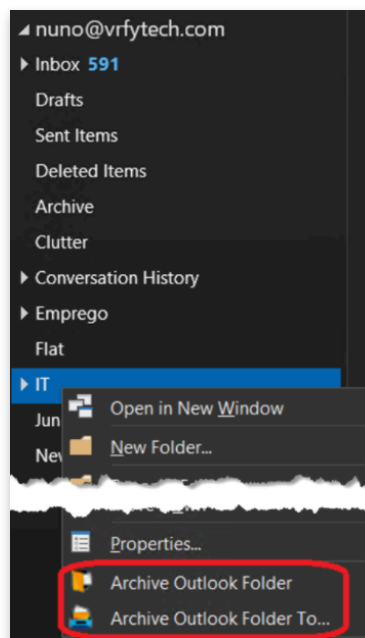
From an administrator perspective, we can use the **Import and Export** Tool to extract emails and calendar items from various email databases or PST files and import them into the Archive Stores.
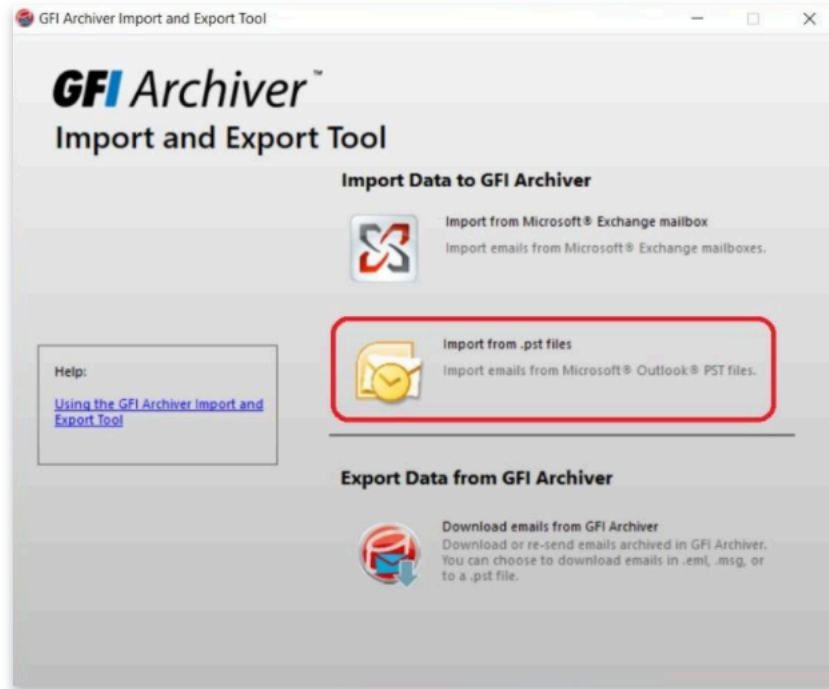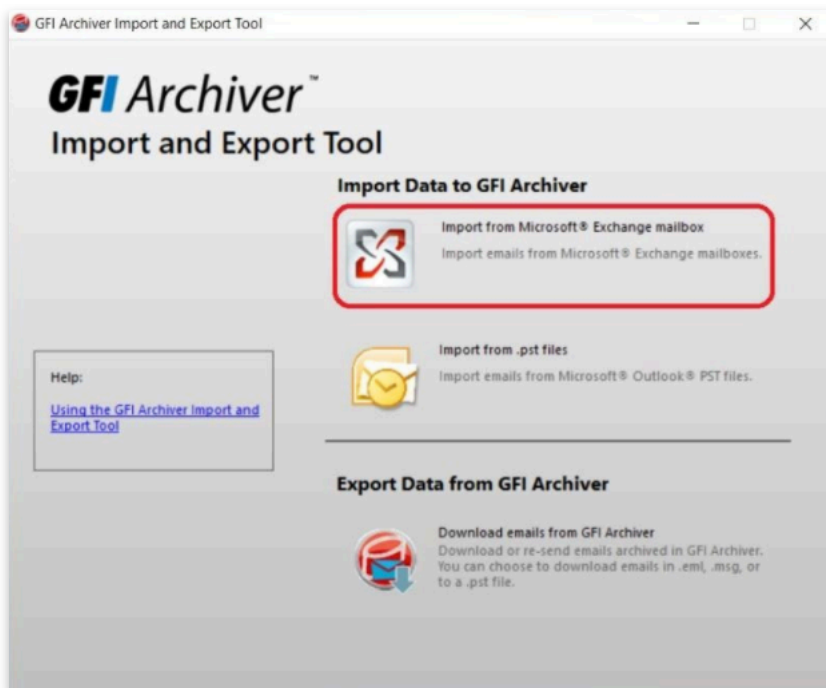

When importing a PST, we can select the folder(s) we want to import:

Choose if we want to import them into GFI Archiver or into a local directory, and select the time range of emails to include:
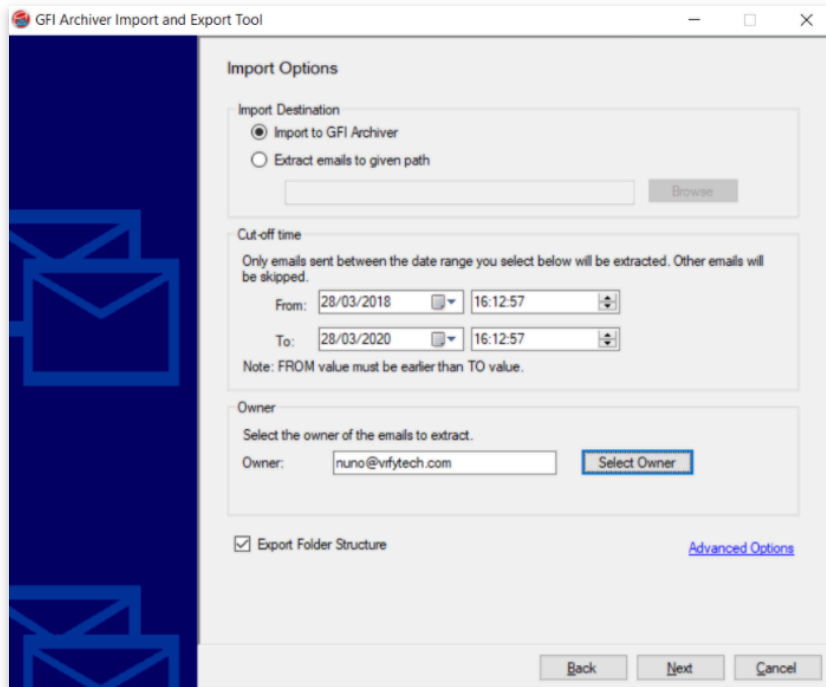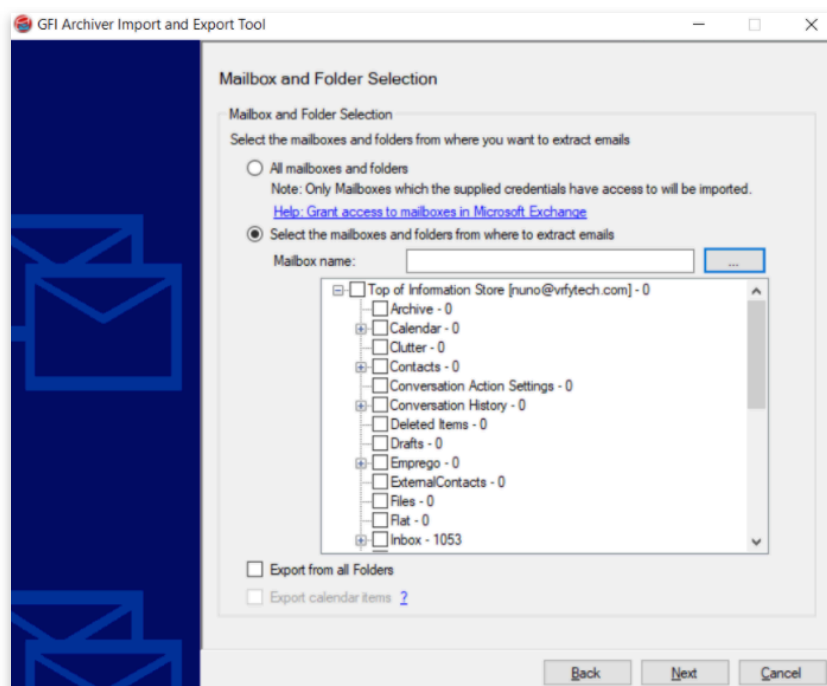

We can also import old data from within Exchange itself:

We simply select which protocol to use (MAPI/Outlook or EWS for example) and specify a user with enough rights to perform this operation:
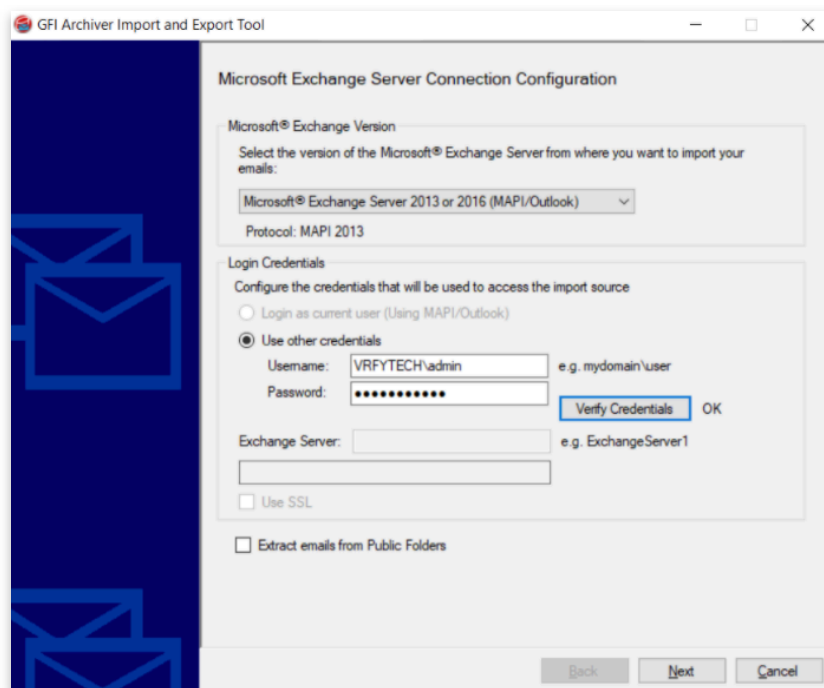
Next, we choose if we want to import data from all mailboxes or from a single mailbox, plus which folder(s) we want to import:

04 Restoring Data

Depending on what GFI Archiver is used for, there might be cases where end-users do not have access to an archive. For example, if GFI is only being used to archive everything out of Exchange for legal reasons. In this case, there is nothing else we need to do or configure.

However, it is likely that users will be given access to their own archive so they can restore any emails they might need, in which case GFI Archiver is effectively a great backup solution. In this case, GFI Archiver supports a number of tools and email clients to transfer archived email messages from the Archive Stores into the user's mailbox.
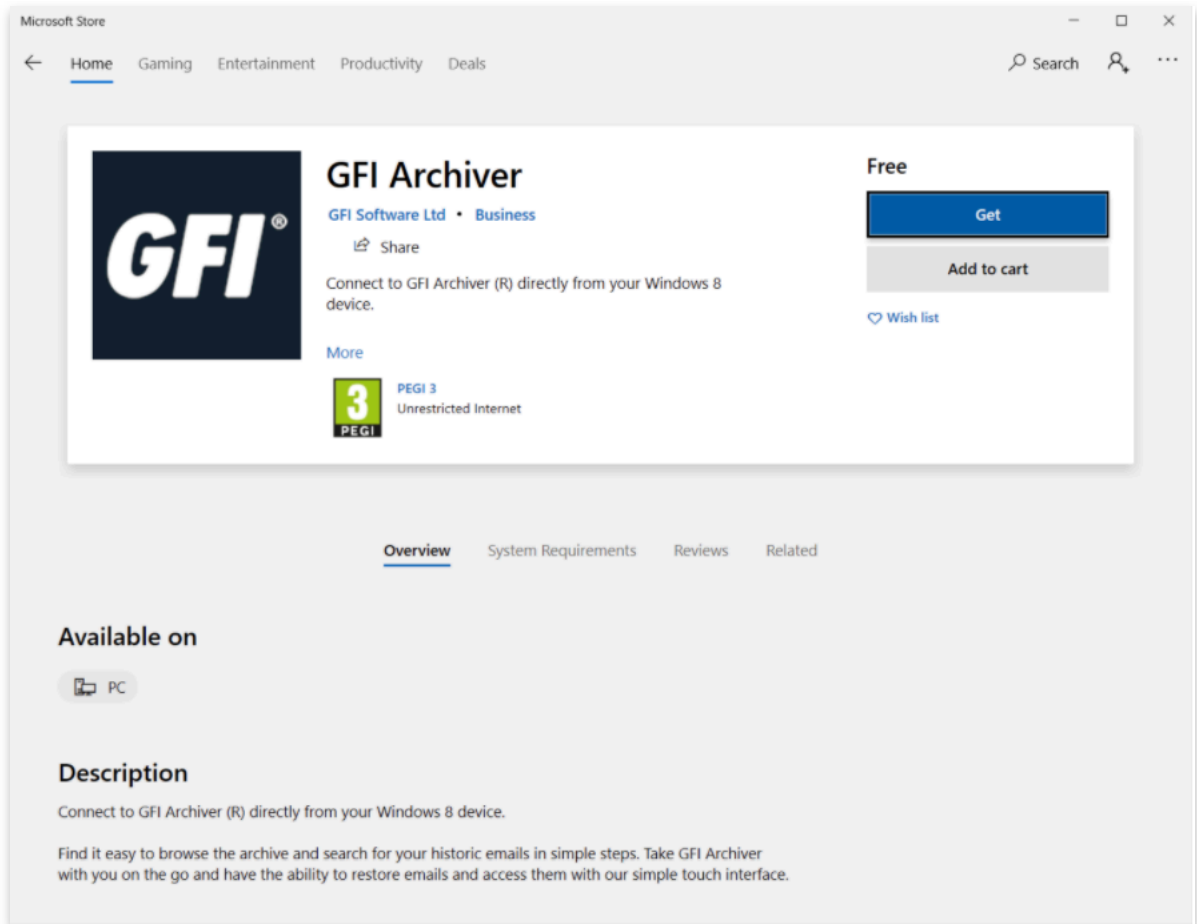
Remote Access

We've already seen how users can login to the GFI Archiver web console and search for and restore any archives items:
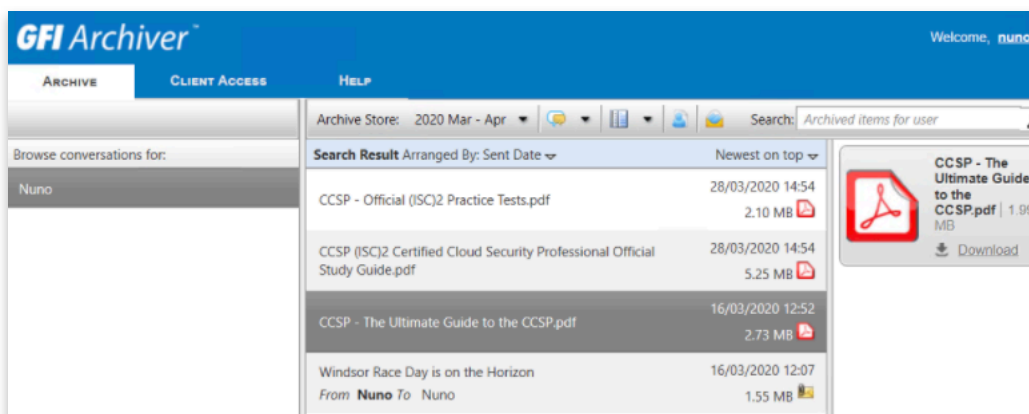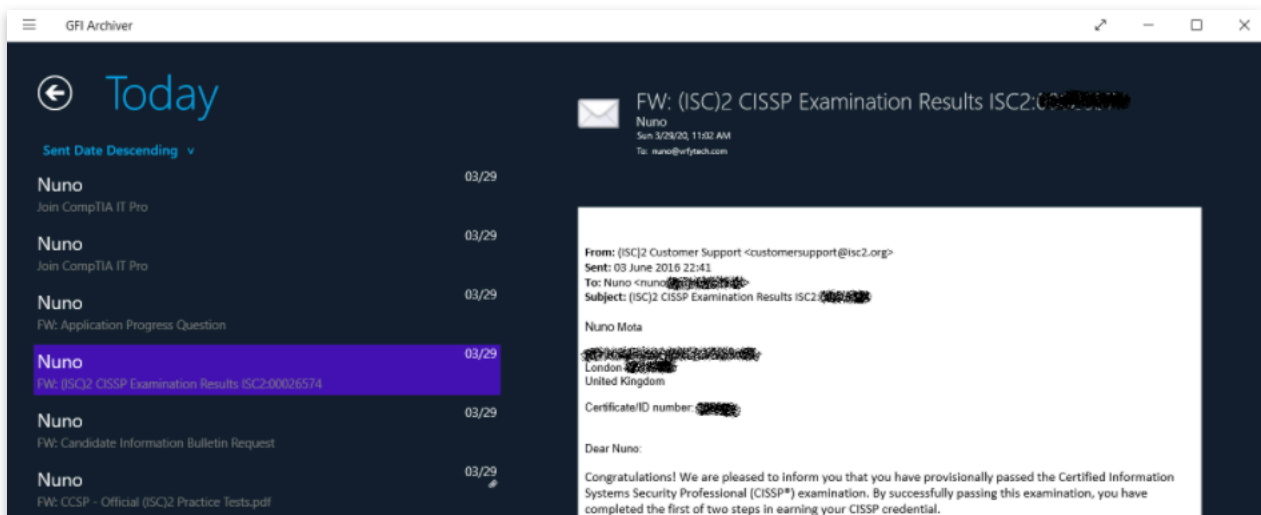

Windows 8/10 App

GFI Archiver has also developed an app for Windows 8/10 operating systems, which can be found in the Microsoft Store:
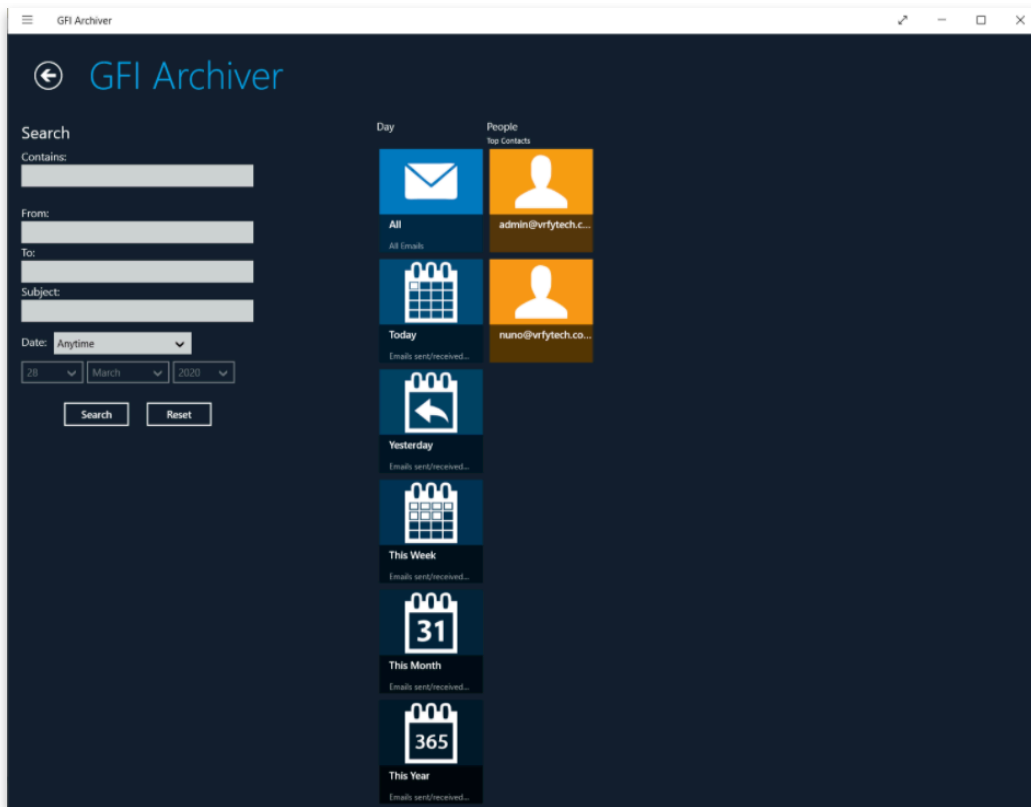
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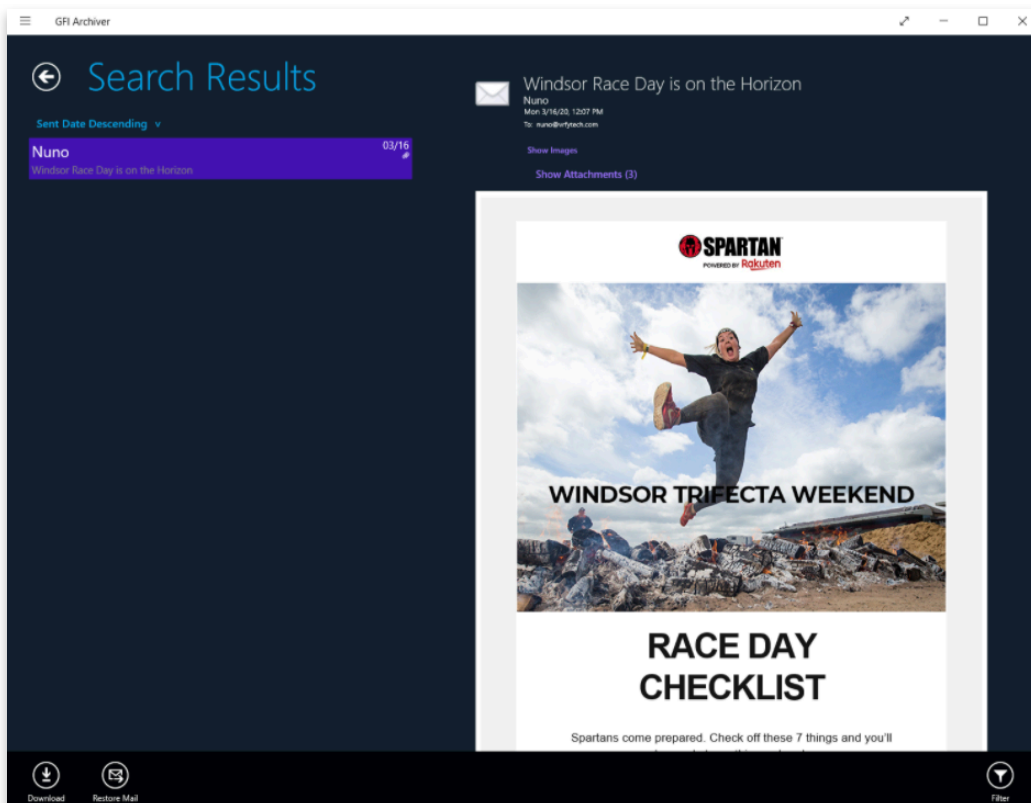This app lets users easily and quickly explore their entire archive:

As well as search for any items within their own archive:

Restoring an item is as easy as finding the item and clicking on *Restore Mail:*

An archiving solution is simply no good if archived emails cannot be recovered in bulk. From an administrator perspective, GFI Archiver provides two tools in order to restore emails (excluding the GUI interface that can be used to recover individual emails as we have already seen). The first one, known as the **Mailbox Restore** tool, provides admins with the facility to restore emails archived within GFI Archiver Archive Stores into a mailbox in Exchange. These can be all emails from a particular mailbox or those within two given dates:
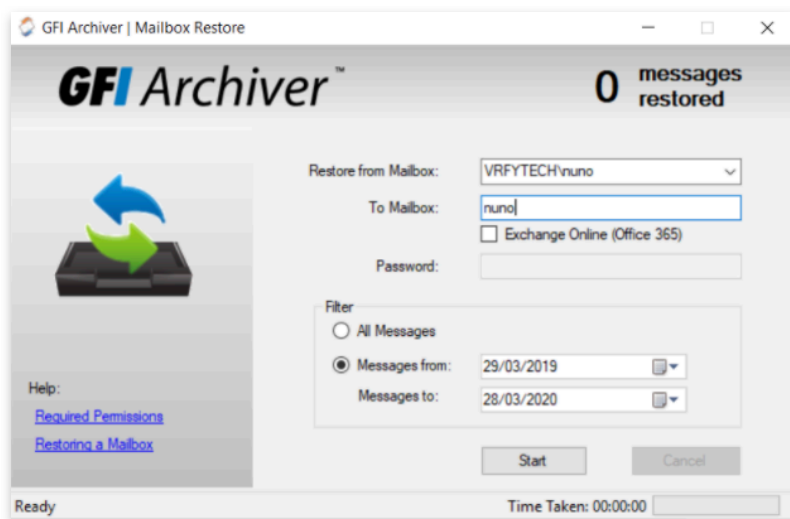

Assuming all the required permissions are in place, it is as simple as this to recover a vast number of emails from a GFI Archiver (the term Restore *from Mailbox* is a bit misleading here) into an Exchange mailbox.

Our second option is the **Import and Export Tool** we already had a look at. This time, however, we use the *Export Data from GFI Archiver* option instead:
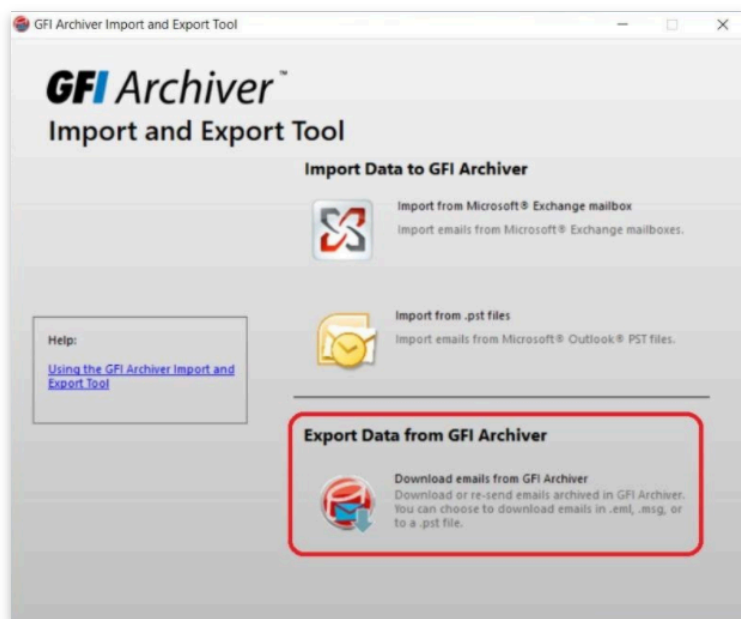
Using this tool, we can connect to a GFI Archiver and export an entire mailbox or search for specific emails (useful to export a set of emails that match specific search criteria to satisfy an eDiscovery case):
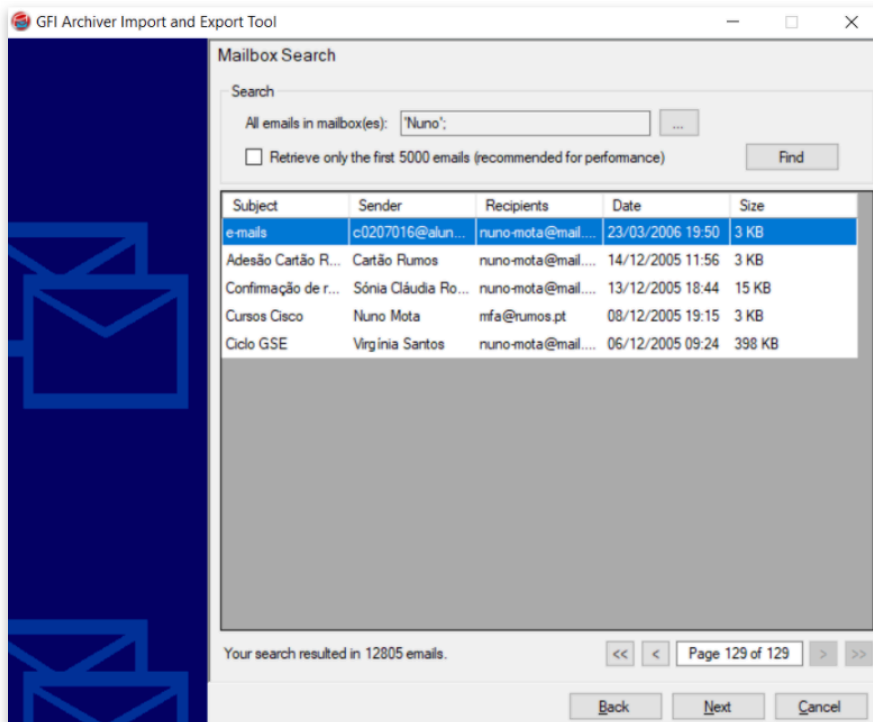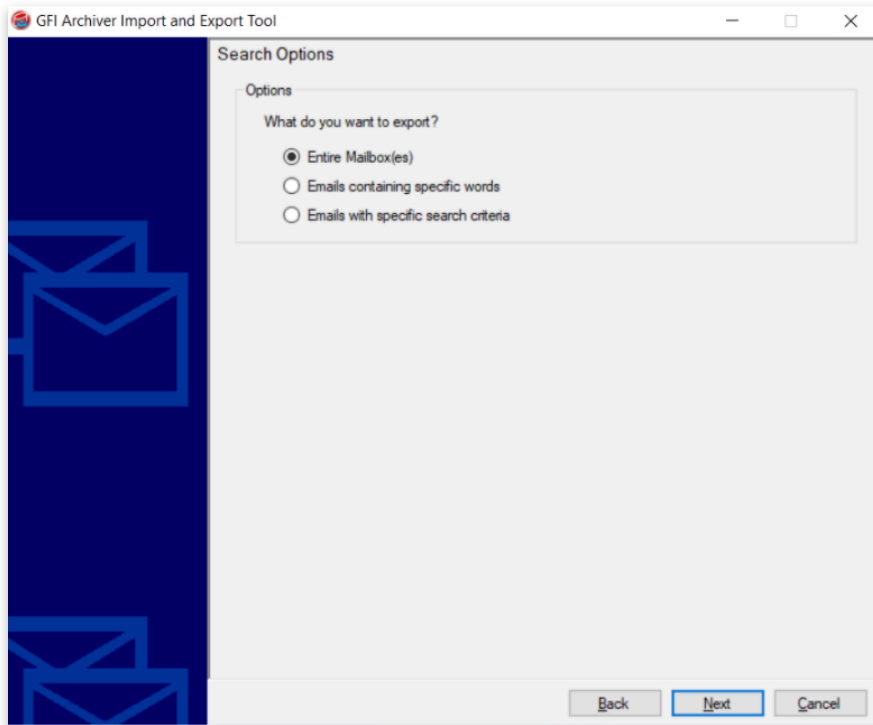
From this result list we can also review particular emails to check that they actually contain what we are looking for by double-clicking on the email to open them. Once we are ready to proceed, we can export all of them in one go to a specific email address, or by downloading them into disk or to a PST file:
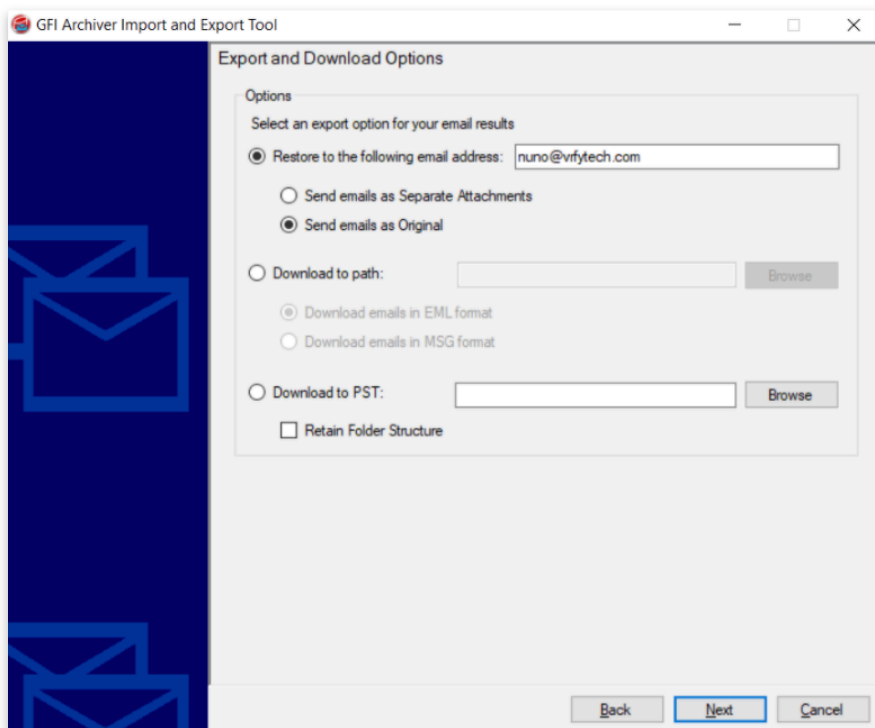

A final window will provide us with some statistics regarding the export process:
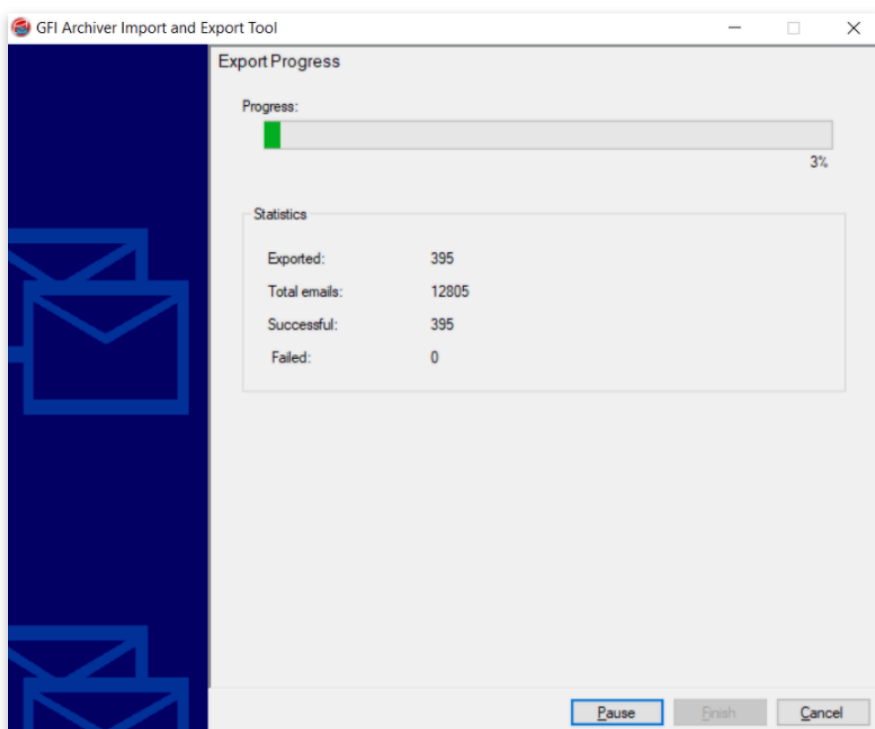

Simple as that!

05 Reports

GFI Archiver provides several amazing reports through its MailInsights reporting feature. These reports, which can be created on demand or scheduled, can help organizations identify business issues, potential security breaches or legal risks by extracting data from archived emails. There are many reports available and, unfortunately, I simply cannot cover them all so here is an overview of some of them:
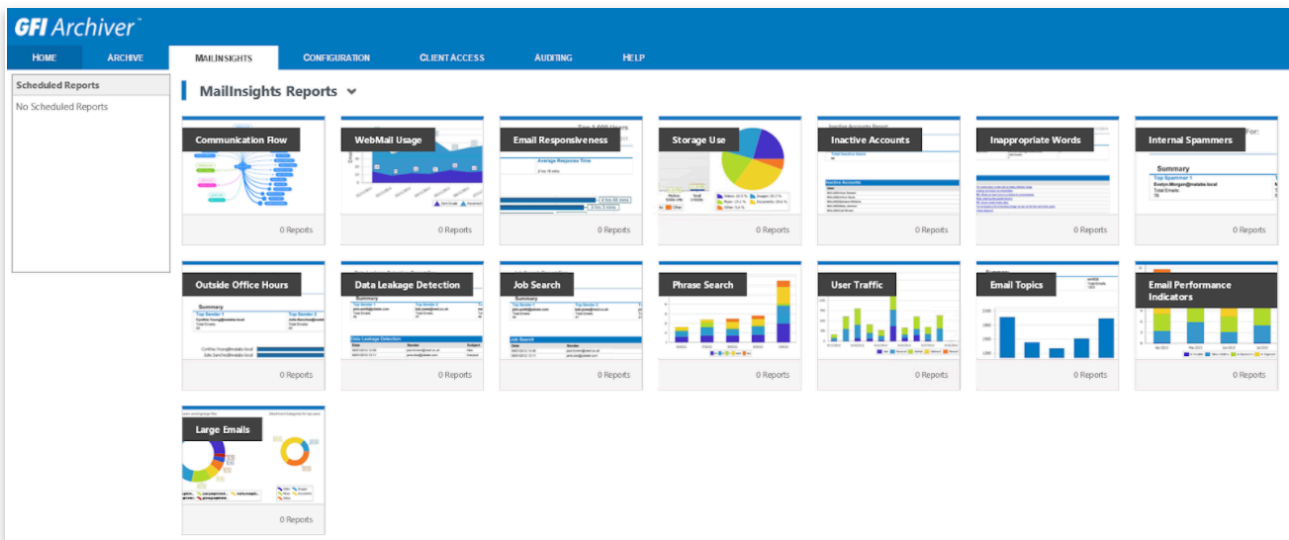

Storage Use shows what is being stored in the archive by everyone or particular users. We can use this report to alert users and to create appropriate retention policies:

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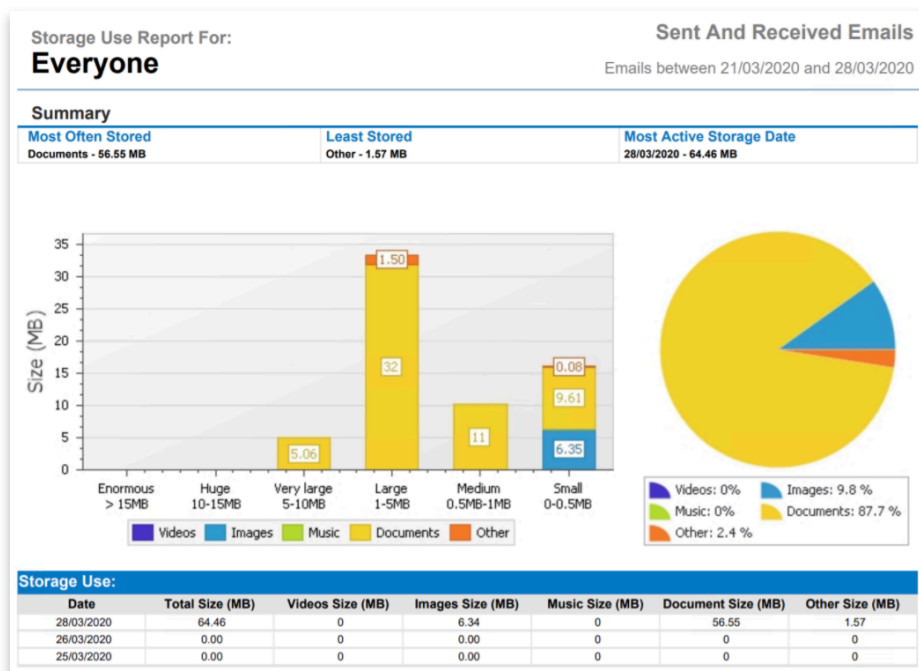
The **User Traffic** graph provides an overview of the number of emails exchanged in the environment and for each individual user:
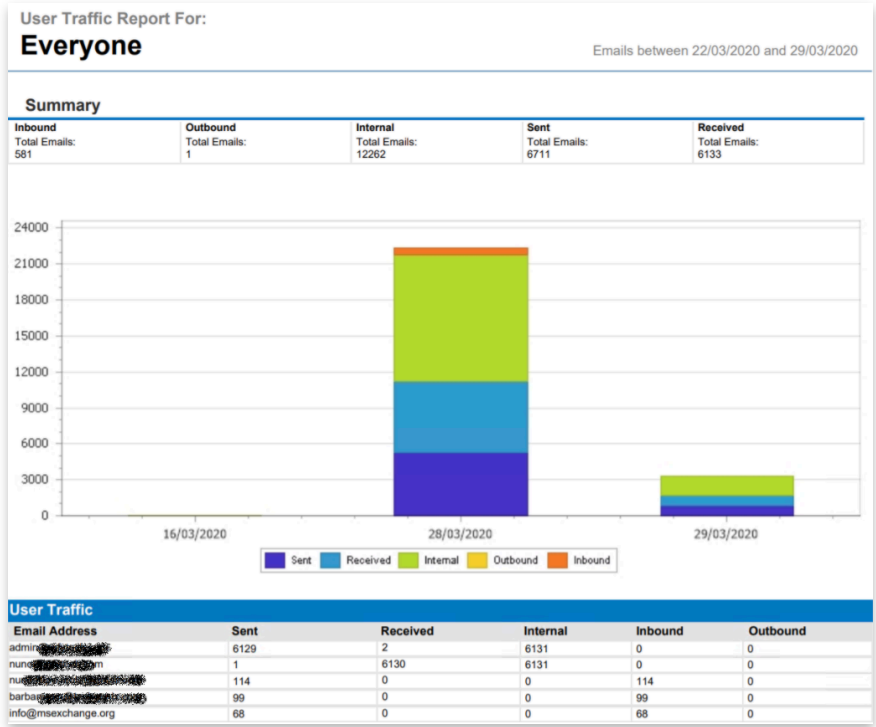
Communication Flow monitors user/group communication patterns inside and outside the organization:
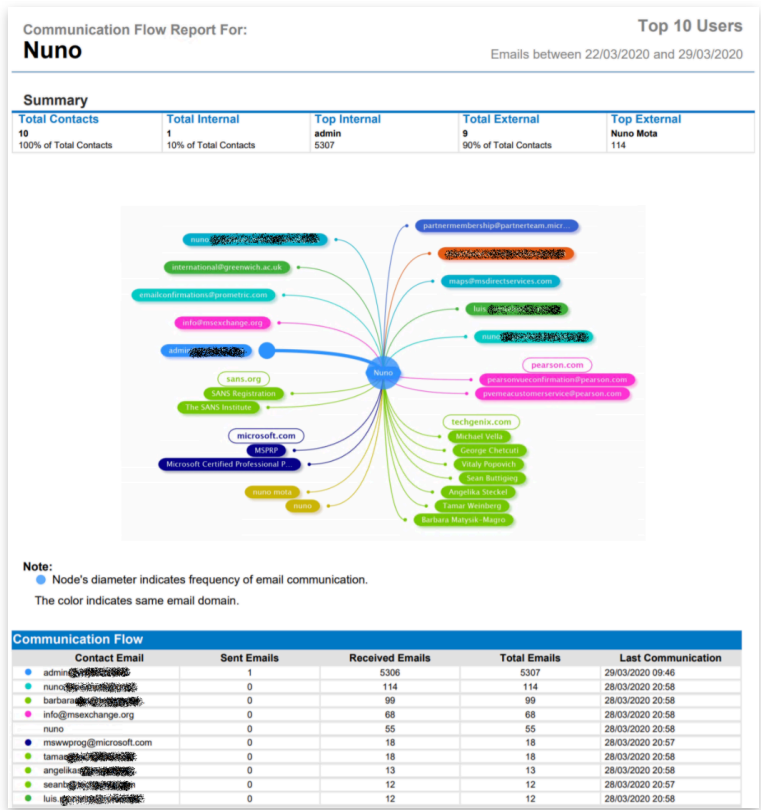
But there are many other useful reports, such as:

- **WebMail Use** identifies top users exchanging emails with free web-based email providers such as Gmail, Hotmail and Yahoo!;

- **Email Responsiveness** shows the average time it takes users to reply to internal and external email:

- **Inappropriate Words** tracks inappropriate language in email that violates company policy;

- **Data Leakage Detection** identifies emails with major credit card numbers and US Social Security numbers, or other confidential documents and information.

06 Final Thoughts

GFI Archiver is without a doubt a great product. Not only does it provide everything most organizations need in terms of archiving capabilities for a variety of systems, as it goes beyond and provides additional features such as useful reports and a multitude of methods for users to manage their archives.

4.8/5

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★ ★ ★ ★ ★ GOLD AWARD
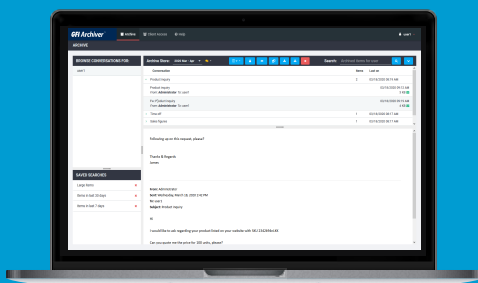
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