Troubleshooting Contacts and Calendar Sync between Android and Exchange

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One of the most common issues I come across with business users and Android smartphones is Exchange contacts and calendars not syncing. With different release numbers, different provider platforms (Motorola Motoblur vs. HTC Sense vs. Samsung Galaxy), and even different installations of Exchange, it can easily become a chore to keep this feature working.

Correct account type

I have seen instances where users have set up their company email on their phone as an IMAP or POP account. When this is done, the contacts and calendars will either not be able to sync or will suffer from sporadic syncing.

When you set up an account on Android, depending upon the type of Android device you have (HTC, Motorola, Samsung, etc.), the correct account type might be called something different. Here are the correct types, according to device manufacturer (all phones listed below run Android 4.0 or later):

- Samsung: Exchange ActiveSync
- HTC: Exchange ActiveSync
- Motorola: Corporate Account

If you’re attempting to sync to an Exchange server with any type of account other than the above, delete the current account and re-create the account with one of the above types.

Make sure sync is set

During the setup of the account, you are asked what you want to sync and how often you want to sync it. I've seen accounts set up with contacts and/or calendars not included in the sync process. To make sure sync is enabled for both contacts and calendars, do the following:

1. Open Settings
2. Tap Accounts and Sync
3. Tap on the Exchange account
4. In the Data and synchronization settings (Figure A), make sure everything is checked
5. Tap Sync Now

Sync settings on a Verizon-branded Samsung Galaxy S III.

If both are set, and your contacts or calendars are not syncing, do the following:

1. Unset both
2. Tap Sync Now
3. Set both
4. Tap Sync Now

Make sure Exchange contacts are displayed

With Android, you can set which contacts to display. You might find that your Exchange contacts are hidden. To find out, follow these steps:

1. Open the Contacts app
2. Tap the menu button
3. Scroll down and select Contacts to display
4. Select Exchange

Now, you should see only your Exchange contacts. If they appear correctly, go back and select All contacts, and see if they remain.

Create a new contact/appointment from phone

I have also witnessed this strange fix. A client came to me with this very problem. I went through all the motions of fixing the issue and nothing worked. It wasn’t until I added a test contact and calendar appointment from the mobile device that everything started working.

Blow away your account

Many wince at this idea — but remember, we’re talking Exchange, so you won’t lose any data. If you have tried to set and unset your sync options and it just won’t work, delete and re-add the account. Make sure you do this when your mobile is connected to Wi-Fi, so the syncing will happen automatically (and do so much more smoothly).