E-Mail Remote Firewall Issues

Many people who travel find that other institutions, hotels, etc. sometimes block SMTP (outgoing e-mail) traffic via their firewall, or redirect it to one of their own SMTP servers.

Traditional solution for on-premises email serves were to use vpn, use an alternate port on the SMTP server, or use web mail interface.

Now that our e-mail providers are cloud providers (UTMail/gmail and Office 365), the VPN connection doesn't seem to work in our split-mode vpn setup, since O365 isn't seen as a UT address. Nor can we open alternate ports on O365 or UTMail/gmail since it is vendor controlled.

Web mail still works in these cases; however many users don't want to use web mail, preferring their normal client instead.

First thing to check is if the SMTP is configured for port 587 instead of port 25. SMTP port 587, or SMTP submission, is usually not blocked because it usually requires SMTP authentication to use, so it's safe from direct-injection spamming. If not using port 587 already, then this should be the first attempted fix.

But if port 587 is also blocked and web mail is not desirable, then there are few open-standard options. With Office 365, you can probably get around such blocks using an "Exchange-savvy" client like Outlook on all platforms, Apple Mail, and any client which uses ActiveSync), since these would use web services to communicate with Exchange Online and hence they shouldn't be affected by firewalls blocking SMTP. Using a non-Exchange-Savvy client means that we would need to use web mail instead.

It is possible that we could setup a proxy on campus for such a case, but at this time there does not seem to be enough demand to justify such an expense. I believe if we wanted to do this, we could do so via the nginx proxy on proxy.cns.utexas.edu (not verified).