

Hosted Desktop or Google Apps?

Does the arrival of Google Apps Premier Edition signal the demise of traditional desktop software like Microsoft Office? Although the idea may sound attractive, the answer is likely to be 'no' – for most companies, at least. There are reasons to welcome the introduction of this hosted office applications suite, but there are just as many reasons to proceed with caution. Be aware of the limitations before you choose this option.

Google Apps

Google Apps is a collection of web-based programs and file storage that run in a web browser and are accessed using a PC, laptop or mobile internet device. The applications include communication tools, productivity tools, a customizable start page and Google Sites. Files and content are stored centrally, and records are kept of different versions of a file for your reference.



Advantages

- Easy to use
- Minimises costs
- Ideal for colleges & universities
- Minimal training required
- Minimal maintenance required
- Highly Secure – data stored offsite
- Enables home / mobile working
- 99.9% uptime guarantee (email only)
- Disaster recovery

Disadvantages

- Partial, limited set of applications
- Adverts displayed over applications
- No integration with existing applications/networks
- No offline access
- Only credit card payments accepted
- Applications can be updated and changed at any time without warning
- Telephone support only available 5 days per week, and only if the service is down
- Data is stored in the US
- Google Docs and Spreadsheets only have a small amount of the MS Office features

Google Apps: “A rudimentary replacement of Microsoft Office for users who need only basic e-mail, word processing and spreadsheet capabilities.”

Hosted Desktops

Hosted desktops are delivered to end users via the internet. They can be accessed using an energy-efficient 'thin client', or a regular PC, laptop or mobile internet device. Hosted desktops look and act exactly like a traditional PC desktop but, instead of residing locally, all software and data are housed in state-of-the-art data centres. This provides cost savings, security, resilience, flexibility and reduced management. Users can connect to their desktop from anywhere with a broadband connection.



Advantages

- Easy to Use
- Minimises costs
- Suitable for organisations of all sizes
- No upfront expenditure needed for PC infrastructure or office applications
- No IT experience necessary
- No maintenance required
- Highly Secure – Data stored offsite
- Enables home / mobile working
- Feature-rich
- Support available 24x7, through ThinkGrid and Partners
- Fully Scalable – Add/Remove Resources
- 99.99% uptime guarantee
- Disaster recovery

Disadvantages

- Dependant on internet connection

Hosted desktops:
“A powerful, accessible system that safeguards your data from hackers, viruses, loss and theft.”

Conclusion

With terms and conditions running to many pages, including clauses that say the company can change the terms at any time (without telling you), it would seem sensible to be very cautious about entrusting any of your data to Google. Over three years, £25 per user per year works out to be around half the cost of a single OEM licence for Microsoft Office 2007 Small Business Edition – and that provides you with considerably greater functionality. Other packages, such as OpenOffice, still have more features than Google Docs but are completely free. Perhaps more worrying for potential users is Google's privacy policy and the way it treats personal information.

Even at Google's offices, Apps is used internally only as a collaboration add-on to Microsoft Office!

All in all, Google Apps lags behind as far as functionality and usability are concerned. If you only deal with plain text, with very little formatting required, you don't mind your documents looking very simple and you can live with all the restrictions and possible breaks in service or loss of confidentiality, then Google Apps could be for you - but in the majority of cases, hosted desktops are likely to present a better way to meet your business needs.

