Business Guide

Office Productivity Software

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Office Productivity Software

As Superfast Broadband becomes more widely available, the term 'the network' ceases to be restricted to meaning 'people in the same building as you', and becomes anywhere with an Internet connection. In addition 'the place of work' ceases to be a building in a fixed location and can now be a coffee shop, a library, a hotel lobby or your kitchen table. With Superfast Broadband the office comes to you, wherever you are.

What is 'office productivity', and why it matters to you

Office productivity allows multiple individuals to collaborate, review and share all manner of documents, spreadsheets, presentations, diagrams, notes and ideas. Many people were, of course, used to working on a standalone office suite installed on a single computer, and the move to a cloud-based 'office suite' (like Google Docs or Microsoft 365) represented a new way of working. Such products, accessed using Superfast Broadband, meant users could still be productive without having to actually be in the office.

For larger organisations that already have internal solutions such as SharePoint many are making them accessible to remote users from the Internet, but for most smaller organisations or start–up organisations they jump straight to a cloud-based solution such as Google Docs or Office365 from day one.

With basic subscriptions starting at just a few pounds per user, per month, it makes more sense for smaller organisations to move straight to the cloud instead of investing up-front in expensive in-house servers and an office to keep them in.

Understand

What Does The Technology Do?

What benefits does the cloud add?
The cloud makes it possible to work from anywhere with an Internet connection (or mobile Internet connection). In a traditional office environment being 'in the office' means 'not being with clients, customers or prospective customers'. However, the cloud can leverage the amount of time your employees take part in revenue generating activities, by minimising the amount of time they are stuck in the office.

With a cloud-based solution the number of new users can be scaled up or down without having to keep changing servers or buying more networking or storage equipment. Cloud is designed to be a 'pay-as-you-go' solution.

How is this different from using Office and a free DropBox account?

In many ways having an online office productivity suite is just like having a traditional set of office applications installed on a computer with an online synchronisation tool such as DropBox, but with several other key benefits.

Typically a 'DropBox' type solution is only designed to be used by a single individual to synchronise the same information across a number of devices owned by the same person. When one person modifies a document it will typically overwrite the previous version rather than add specific sections to the document collaboratively.

In addition to this, organisations will often want to control which users can access certain folders and documents, and make sure that certain files such as personal photos, videos or music are not visible to other members of staff.

So in short, the technology works in a similar way, but true cloud-based office productivity solutions have been designed from the ground up with organisations in mind, and are tightly integrated with the applications used to create and modify these types of documents.

The 'multi-user' collaboration and reviewing features means that each user's comments, corrections or additions can be incorporated into other people's work, and won't overwrite or replace this work.

Documents, designs and presentations can be treated more like a whiteboard, where each person has their own whiteboard pen to add comments and suggestions to a single copy of the document at the same time.

How does it help me to collaborate with colleagues?

As stated above, a true office productivity and collaboration suite allows for multiple users to all work on the same document at the same time, or exclusively 'check-out' a document to work on in isolation, and then 'check-in' the document again once they have finished working on it (depending on whichever method suits them best at the time).

How does it help me work with multiple different devices?

Cloud-based office productivity tools are designed to work across a wide range of devices and operating systems. Cloud providers work hard to offer support for all of the most popular devices on the market, and some have specific 'apps' available for download.

If you are planning to use a cloud-based office productivity suite with multiple mobile devices it may be worth checking with the office productivity suite provider, or the device manufacturer, to see if the services you are considering are compatible, or if a dedicated app is available.

Where a dedicated app is available the user experience is usually better than working with web pages designed to look like applications (often simply known as 'WebApps').

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How Do I Get Started?

Setting up a trial
Almost every cloud provider will allow you to 'try before you buy'. In fact most cloud providers offer some kind of 'limited free version' to entice users to upgrade to paid version, or 'premium' versions. This 'free' version to drive upgrades to 'premium' versions is often described by cloud providers as the 'free-mium' model (to describe the free to premium nature of the trial). The 'Further Information' section at the end of this guide provides links to some of the more popular cloud services that offer free trials.

Security issues
As with all confidential, commercially sensitive or personally identifiable data, care must be taken to ensure 'data security' and 'data protection' are taken into account. Any passwords used for online services should contain a mixture of upper-case letters, lower-case letters and numbers (as a minimum) to make it difficult for unauthorised users to guess passwords easily and access the data.

Compatibility issues
As with all computer software and services, you should perform a small trial or test with the devices you are considering before placing a large order or signing a contract. If in doubt try to speak to the cloud provider or hardware vendor before making a decision, or ask for a solution already 'certified' to work by the vendors.

Choosing a provider
When choosing a provider you should consider how reliable the provider's service has been in the past. The reliability is often measured as a percentage of 'uptime'. Uptime is used to provide an indication (but not a guarantee), of how often the service is 'up' over a month, a quarter or a year. Availability is often measured in 'nines, with 'five nines' being the best that even the largest companies can hope to achieve.

Availability %	Downtime per Year	Downtime per Month	Downtime per Week
99% ('two nines')	3.65 days	7.20 hours	1.68 hours
99.9% ('three nines')	8.76 hours	43.8 minutes	10.1 minutes
99.99% ('four nines')	52.56 minutes	4.32 minutes	1.01 minutes
99.999% ('five nines')	5.26 minutes	25.9 seconds	6.05 seconds

Exploit

What Business Benefits Can I Expect?

Flexibility and mobile working

Where employees are able to work whilst out of the office or travelling it means that a train journey, coffee shop, reception area or hotel room becomes a mobile office, and allows the employee to use the device that suits them best at that particular time.

Whilst working from home this might be a laptop or home computer connected to the home Superfast broadband connection, and whilst travelling, or on customers' sites, it may be a tablet or smartphone using WiFi or a 3G\4G mobile Internet connection.

Reducing the cost of expensive software upgrades

In many organisations the software they use, is tied to a particular operating system such as Windows XP or Windows 7, and that operating system is tied to a particular piece of hardware such as a desktop PC or laptop.

When office productivity is based around applications, instead of devices you don't have to keep replacing the hardware to update the applications. In the case of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) the users might just provide all of the hardware themselves, saving the organisation the cost of purchasing and maintaining the equipment (typically every three to five years).

Automatic versioning, storage and backup of documents

Almost every office productivity suite available has some form of version control and keeps revisions of documents that can be viewed or 'rolled-back' to if a mistake is made or a document becomes corrupt.

To enable the various versioning and revisioning features, office productivity providers need to make automatic backups of documents as users are working on them, and keep several versions from different points in time. As the cloud provider is making these backups automatically for end users, the organisation does not necessarily have to make their own as well.

Automatic synchronisation of documents between devices

Where a user has multiple devices, documents can be synchronised automatically between them. Any documents already stored on the device can be used whilst the user is 'offline', and any new documents or changes are sent automatically once the device is connected back 'online' again. In simple terms, you don't need to be 'online' all of the time to work on a document, just online to update the cloud with any new versions you may have been working on whilst disconnected.

The guide you are reading now was produced on two different laptops, and reviewed on a smartphone and a tablet without the need to manually copy files backwards and forwards. Whilst working on this guide from the office or at home a large powerful laptop with a three hour battery life, a big screen and a full-size keyboard was used, and whilst travelling a much smaller laptop about the size of a hardback book with a nine hour battery life was carried around in a rucksack and used whilst on-the-move.

Another useful benefit of this automatic synchronisation is that if a device becomes lost, stolen or damaged a new device can simply be used as a replacement and all of the documents the user had before are automatically available to the new device.

Collaboration without needing to use email

Before online office productivity suites became popular it was common practice to email documents between people as they were being written. As well as the inconvenience of sending multiple emails with attachments, and mailboxes becoming full of documents that had since become out-of-date, versioning was often very hit-and-miss.

It wasn't uncommon to see several versions of the same document all in the same folder with no indication of which document was indeed the 'latest' and if any comments were missing, or if any previous comments had been overwritten.

Sometimes each user would have their own numbering scheme that would become combined with everybody else's numbering scheme and labelling scheme to produce some very cryptic document names such as 'presentation-v4-final-with-daves-comments-rev2-final-check-for-ACME'.

Having a multi-user versioning and revisioning system means that everyone can have the latest version of 'Presentation-for-ACME' without having to manually email files around or try to keep changing the name of the document in order to describe how it differs from the other versions in circulation.

Top Tips

Look at trialling software before committing to purchase

Consider using a trial of a subscription service such as Microsoft Office 365 or Google Docs to familiarise yourself with the new 'Cloud' versions of familiar applications.

Review the cost saving options offered by Open Source

Consider using a free/Open Source suite such as OpenOffice or LibreOffice as an alternative to 'best-of-breed' products with high purchase costs, or subscription costs.

Consider the use of mobile apps

If mobile 'apps' are available for the services you are trialling then installing one of these will often make the service easier to use and less 'clunky' than using a web-browser on a smaller screen.

Test the benefits of synchronisation

If you have more than one computer, laptop or mobile device, try synchronising the same account between all of the devices at the same time.

Use external monitors for presentations

Most tablets have additional adapters available that can be used to connect them to an external monitor or projector allowing them to be used to present in front of an audience directly from an office productivity suite.

Use a business trip to trial different options

If you know you have a journey or business trip coming up, why not try creating a piece of work using a cloud or online productivity suite, and working on it from different computing devices, tablets or smartphones.

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NEXT STEPS

1. **Register to attend a fully-funded Business Development Workshop.**
    www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/events

2. **Make an appointment to see a Business Advisor who will help you create a personal action plan to grow your business.**
    www.business.wales.gov.uk/contact-us

For further information on Office Productivity take a look at:

See how other businesses in Wales have exploited Superfast Broadband
www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/superfast-success-stories

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Find out how much your business could save with our
www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/savings-calculator

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Other business guides that may interest you include:
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