

Chapter 1

Introducing Google Apps

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting acquainted with Google Apps
 - ▶ Choosing the version of Google Apps that's right for you
 - ▶ Discovering the pros and cons of using Google Apps
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The Internet has evolved, and Google is leading the way. Google began as a small Internet search engine experiment, but when the folks at Google found they had a hit on their hands, they didn't stop there. Today, you can keep track of everything, from e-mail to stock portfolios to photos, by using free services created by the ingenious *Googlers* (the bright engineers at Google who work behind the scenes to make the Internet cool and easy for everyone). Google is pushing forward into new territory with the innovative Google Apps and taking key functions, such as calendaring and word processing, into the Internet realm.

This chapter gives you a better understanding of how Google Apps works and helps you choose the version that's best for your organization. You can also find out more about Google Apps by visiting www.google.com/a. If you're interested in Google Apps for school or work teams, go to www.google.com/apps instead.

Meeting the Google Apps

With little fanfare, the Mountain View, California, behemoth known as Google has been building, buying, and beta-testing scores of online applications. And Google has been releasing them in a flurry, one right after another, to an unsuspecting world. The first 30 or 40 apps seemed random. It appeared that any cool idea any Googler could think of was turned into an app and tossed onto the Internet just for the fun of it. It was a blur. If you blinked, you missed something. It didn't seem to have a pattern or a purpose.

With the creation of the Google Apps initiative, the strategy behind the software releases came into sharp focus: Google is building a radically different way of working that can shatter the primacy of the current methods and reduce the need for all the tired, old office productivity software on your hard drive. Oh, and Google provides most of the apps for free or at a fraction of the cost of traditional software.

Google Apps is a powerful set of tools that Google has bundled together to meet the needs of businesses, schools, government agencies, and other organizations of any size. You can use Google Apps as a powerful digital communications infrastructure for your business or school that Google maintains for you. (Very sweet.) The key Google Apps are

- ✓ **Gmail:** An e-mail app based on Google's popular Gmail platform. This version lets you use your organization's domain, such as *user@yourdomain.com*.
- ✓ **Calendar:** A calendar and scheduling app that allows easy collaboration.
- ✓ **Talk:** Instant messaging, available directly from within Gmail or as a standalone software application. Talk also allows voice calls, voice mail, and file sharing.
- ✓ **Docs:** A simple, yet powerful, set of word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation apps.
- ✓ **The Start Page:** An app that you can personalize by adding gadgets to access any or all of the other Google Apps, as well as news, weather reports, entertainment information, and more from one place.

In addition to the apps themselves, Google provides some powerful tools for administrators in the Google Apps Dashboard. Features for administrators include

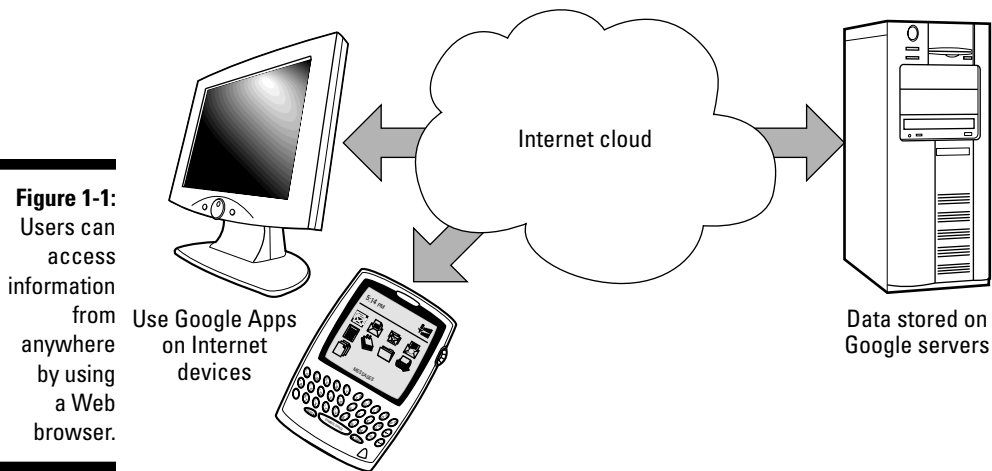
- ✓ Web page creation tools
- ✓ Domain settings
- ✓ Advanced tools, including administrative support and migration tools
- ✓ Individual apps settings
- ✓ Custom Web addresses for your Google Apps
- ✓ Phone-based support tools

Welcome to the New Internet

Google believes that you want to spend more time doing things with your organization, family, group, or school in an online environment.

Called *cloud computing*, the premise is that users can create, edit, and store massive amounts of information through the Internet (or “cloud”) with any device that has a Web browser (such as a computer or cellphone) and Internet access. The Web applications (or apps, for short), as well as the files themselves, are stored securely on powerful servers in data centers throughout the world, as illustrated in Figure 1-1.

Users can share their information with others, including friends and co-workers, and collaborate in real time on important projects. Because the files are already online, a user simply sends a message to his or her friends that contains a link to a file, and those friends can click the link to see and contribute to the sender’s great work. Using Google Apps, you don’t need to send attachments back and forth or keep track of different file versions.



Google Apps brings cloud computing to the masses. And it helps alleviate some of the issues of traditional computing:

- ✓ **Cost:** Computer hardware and software is expensive. For schools and businesses alike, buying PCs and servers, and all the software that goes with them, is making less and less financial sense — especially when it all becomes obsolete before anyone figures out how to use the new stuff. These organizations want solutions that can provide a better return on investment.
- ✓ **Maintenance:** Maintaining all those PCs and the network software is a pain. Information technology costs even more money and uses a lot of resources — especially when organizations grow and someone needs to maintain all those new users.

✓ **Hassle:** People are tired of installing new software, downloading and installing updates, backing up files, scanning for viruses, maintaining firewalls — it's all a bit much. Most people just want to get their work done, and most companies want to focus on their real business, not on information technology. (Unless, of course, their business *is* information technology. Those companies love all the hassle.)

So, why not go with Google and leave all the tedious technical stuff to the people not savvy enough to jump on the Google bandwagon? If you keep your information in their Internet cloud, you don't need to buy any servers, load any software, scan for any viruses, or back anything up. No more rebooting the server or your PC when the system crashes, again. Everything just works with a lot less cost, maintenance, and hassle because it's coming to you directly from Google.

To put it all into perspective, here's an analogy for you: Would you rather hide your life savings under your mattress and risk it being stolen or lost in a fire, or store it in a bank where you have access to it anytime, anywhere, from an ATM machine?

In this new, Web-enabled world, your Web browser becomes your ATM, and Google becomes your bank. You can use your own domain name, company logo, and all that branded identity stuff to personalize your Google Apps. You can preserve your corporate, school, or organizational identity and slash your costs in a dramatic way.

Choosing the Right Google Apps Edition

As we mention in the “Meeting the Google Apps” section, earlier in this chapter, Google Apps consists of four main programs: Gmail, Calendar, Docs, and Talk. Anyone can use these services without signing up for Google Apps, but to help organizations replace or complement their existing systems, Google has some powerful administrative and collaborative tools for those ready to take the plunge.

You can choose from four Google Apps editions: Team, Standard, Premier, and Education. Each edition has been customized to meet the needs of different types of organizations, large and small:

✓ **Team Edition:** This is the easiest way to start using the collaborative tools available with Google Apps with your school or work team. You don't have to change your e-mail address or worry about any administration tools. Sign up for free with your existing e-mail address (see Chapter 2 on how to do this) and you can start connecting with other people in your domain right away. Gmail is not included in this edition.

- ✓ **Standard Edition:** Use this edition if you're a family, group, or small business. Register or transfer your domain to access Gmail, Calendar, Talk, Docs, and the Start Page. This version is free (meaning ad-sponsored) and supported by online help. You can always upgrade to Premier Edition later, if you want to.
- ✓ **Premier Edition:** Medium to large organizations should generally use this edition. At the time of this publication, it costs \$50 per user per year, but you likely currently spend more than that on maintenance of your existing setup. Because this is a paid edition, you can choose to turn Gmail ads off. This edition also has additional administration tools and security settings. Your users receive significantly more storage space than with the Standard Edition.
- ✓ **Education Edition:** Built for — you guessed it — schools, colleges, and universities. Nonprofit organizations can also use this version. This version is free (although not supported by ads), and it includes many of the features from the Premier Edition (albeit a little less storage space). If you're interested in the Education Edition, Google requires you to provide proof of accredited not-for-profit status.



The best program is the one that best meets the needs of your organization. See Chapter 2 to find out how to sign up.

Table 1-1 shows which features are available in each edition of Google Apps.

Table 1-1 Features in the Google Apps Editions				
<i>Feature</i>	<i>Team</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>Premier</i>	<i>Education</i>
Gmail, Calendar, Docs, Talk, Page Creator, and Start Page	Calendar, Docs, Talk, and Start Page	Yes	Yes	Yes
E-mail storage	No	6+ GB per user	25+ GB per user	6+ GB per user
Conference room and resources scheduling	No	No	Yes	Yes
IMAP for Gmail	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mobile access	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Administrator control panel (Dashboard)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

(continued)

Table 1-1 (continued)

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Team</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>Premier</i>	<i>Education</i>
Policy management	No	No	Yes	No
APIs to integrate with existing structure	No	No	Yes	Yes
E-mail migration and routing	No	No	Yes	Yes
Online support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Live/phone support	No	No	Yes	Yes

What's in It for My Organization?



As part of the Google Apps program, Google hosts your e-mail, documents, spreadsheets, presentations, calendars, and more at little or no cost. A team, business, school, or organization of any size can have Google Apps up and running quickly. When you use Google Apps, your IT resources aren't so drained because Google takes care of the technical details. Oh, yeah — and they keep your information safe and secure.



Here are a few additional features of Google Apps that may grab the attention of decision makers and your IT department:

- ✓ You don't have to purchase or set up any hardware.
- ✓ Because Google Apps are Web-based applications, you don't need to download, install, update, or pay for software again when new versions are released. (Except for a Web browser, of course, and at least you don't have to pay for that.)
- ✓ Your organization can use its own domain name for e-mail addresses and Web pages when you use Google Apps.
- ✓ Google boasts a 99.9% reliability rate, which means that the service rarely, if ever, goes down.
- ✓ Google takes care of all the data backup and support operations.
- ✓ Google provides online support resources for free and gives 24/7 support — including phone-based support — for Premier Edition and Education Edition users.

- ✓ You can set up users quickly by using the Dashboard.
- ✓ A single sign-on adds convenience for Premier Edition users. Users can sign in once and access all their Google Apps in addition to other corporate intranet or school resources.
- ✓ Gmail can support an existing e-mail gateway.
- ✓ Administrators can access e-mail migration tools for Premier Edition and Education Edition customers.
- ✓ Gmail protects users by constantly updating and running very effective and efficient spam-blocking, virus-protection, and filtering software.



Don't forget one of the biggest advantages of using Google Apps: Whether you're at the office, traveling, working from home, or sipping a latte in a café that has a wireless hotspot, as long as you have a live Internet connection, you can log into your Google Apps account. Also, you can check your e-mail and do other tasks from your mobile device.

Can There Possibly Be a Downside?

If using Google Apps has any disadvantages, they mostly revolve around your personal relationship with your Internet connection. Assuming you do have a decent connection (something high-speed in nature is best), you're good to go. If you don't have an Internet connection, we recommend you put this book down, buy another book — we recommend *Writing on Stone Tablets For Dummies* — and take up activities that don't require the use of electricity.



You must be online to use Google Apps. Checking your e-mail, updating your calendar, and collaborating on a document require online interactivity. Google Apps doesn't work without an Internet connection. Internet connection speed is important, too: Google Apps does work over dial-up connections, but it's sooooo slow. (Nevertheless, you can always connect with dial-up when you're away from your high-speed connection.)



When deciding whether to use Google Apps, remember that all these services are in *perpetual beta*, meaning that unlike traditional software that gets a new, big update every year or so, Google is constantly updating its services and adding new features. Although the most common features are fully implemented, you should check to make sure that the features your organization needs are available. (Along those lines, you may occasionally notice a slight difference between what you see on your screen and what you see in the figures in this book if Google made an update after this book was published.)

The upside, of course, to the perpetual beta model is that by the time the features of the new version have been rolled out, Google Apps users are already familiar with the changes, so you have to deal with only a minimal learning curve. When you and your fellow users get up to speed, you just need to keep using the products to stay up to date. And keeping ahead of the curve is an advantage, all by itself.