

Sunday, August 27, 2006

Google Launches Enterprise Software Solution

By Ross Dunn, CEO, [StepForth Search Engine Placement Inc.](#)

Google launched a free packaged business solution for enterprises today including online chat, email, calendars, and hosting. Called "[Gmail for Your Domain](#)" (a ghastly name that is only slightly better referred to as "Google Apps" within the actual admin area) this application package will allow a business owner or administrator to create a separate account per employee.

Each Google Apps account comes complete with the following Google applications:



Gmail: Google's email program is the central offering of this set of applications; it acts as the main portal where the Talk and Calendar functions are provided. Each user has 2 gigabytes of email storage complete with some robust email management tools that allow automatic email filtering, POP email access, SPAM management, and contact management.

Required Setup Procedure: Requires that you shift all email protocol from your domain (i.e. www.stepforth.com) to Google so that email can be sent and received using your domain (so that your email correctly displays it came from your domain).



Google Calendar: Probably the most feature rich application within this entire package, Google Calendar provides users with the ability to share appointments or entire calendars. It also has a basic event management option that allows you to manage RSVP lists and invite associates to meetings. Check out [the full Google Calendar feature list here](#).

Required Setup Procedure for Google Calendar and Google Talk: The only requirement is that you prove you are the legitimate owner of the domain you setup your account with. The activation process is simple; just upload a specific html file to your website for Google to verify and voila, both Calendar and Talk are enabled.



Google Talk: An instant messaging and voice chat application, Google Talk automatically allows access to the contact list within Gmail making connections to business associates and employees simpler. Here is the official description on Talk from Google: "a downloadable Windows application from Google that enables Gmail users to quickly and easily talk or IM with their friends for free. Google is focused on developing innovative technologies that enhance people's lives, and Google Talk encourages and simplifies instant communication across the web."

Google Web Publishing: This is a free hosting and page creation system (Page Creator) that allows you to create and publish your enterprise site. The site is hosted on Google servers and can only be a maximum of 100 pages in size.

Required Setup Procedure: You must add a CNAME to your domain management configuration (usually by asking your hosting provider) which will setup a subdomain (i.e. <http://site.yoursite.com>) that you can upload and administer through Google Apps.



Account Administration

The account administrator using a central online Dashboard can administer all Google accounts. Within the Dashboard, the administrator can do the following:

- ✓ setup domain aliases,
- ✓ setup email catch-all addresses,
- ✓ create internal email lists (i.e. staff@yoursite.com would go to... list all in-house recipients)
- ✓ make minor cosmetic (color) customizations to the company sign in page,

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- ✓ customize your Google Apps system with your company logo,
- ✓ enable or disable contact sharing; which when enabled provides a central contact list that all users will have access to.,
- ✓ create and update multiple user accounts at once by uploading a spreadsheet with username and password information,
- ✓ centrally configure individual user privileges, alternate email addresses and passwords,
- ✓ view access, and email quota statistics for each user.

My Take on Google Apps

I setup an account to see how this new offering works and I think it has some real potential as long as the needs of an organization are basic. I say this because the majority of companies that I know of would not be comfortable switching their vital communication and scheduling systems to an online model that is not under their control. After all, I do not expect there will be anyone to bark at if Google Apps experiences problems; one of the significant minuses of using a free system (never mind one in beta).

Additionally, a couple of the applications are definitely in their infancy. For example, Google Calendar does not offer any synchronization capabilities for handhelds or PC's, so if you make the switch there is no way (currently) to update your handheld with your Google Calendar schedule. This chink alone is enough to keep me from making the switch. Oh and I must not forget Google Page Creator and the free hosting service; it is, well, pointless in its current state. After all, there is no way to upload a website other than using Page Creator, which is a website-publishing tool in its extreme infancy. I can only assume that the web-publishing facet of Google Apps was included as a frill.

Will Websites Hosted on Google Have an Advantage?

Perhaps but the advantage is minimal; [Google states](#) in the Google Apps help area that new sites within their system can expect to be indexed within "a few hours of publication"; an impressive turnaround. Hosting on Google will also likely lead to faster indexing of updated content. After all, faster updating would be a considerable tease if (make that 'when') Google wants to make a bolder step into the web hosting industry and provide more advanced hosting packages. It is truly a brilliant plan, I mean, how could other search engines compete with a rival search engine that merely has to look to its own network to index a sizable portion of the Internet. At any rate, this basic hosted solution has been around for a while so I don't want to waste your time with information you may already know (here is [more info on Page Creator](#)).

How Long Will Google Apps Be Free?

If you [signup](#) during the Beta test of this program you will get use of Google Apps for free indefinitely according to the [Google Apps Terms & Conditions](#) but after the Beta Period you "may not" get the benefit of newly added technologies without paying. The following is relevant snippet from the T&C:

No Fees. *Provided that Google continues to offer the Google Hosted Services to Customer, Google will provide a version of the Google Hosted Services (with substantially the same services as those provided as of the Effective Date) free of charge to Customer indefinitely; provided that such commitment (i) applies only to End User Accounts created during the period when the Google Hosted Services are considered a beta service (the "Beta Period") by Google (such Beta Period determination at Google's sole discretion) and (ii) may not apply to new opt-in services added by Google to the Google Hosted Services in the future.*

Will There Be a More Advanced Version Soon?

"For sake of clarity, Google reserves the right to offer a premium version of the Google Hosted Services for a fee." (Excerpt from Google Apps Terms & Conditions). In fact, the answer appears to be a resounding yes since Google wants you to [notify](#) them if you are interested in a premium version so that they can let you know when it comes available.

What Else May Be Coming to Google Apps?

I fully expect that following apps will be included in the near future, just click on them to see their formal description at Google:

- ✓ **Google Notepad** ([more info](#))
Share important notes with your staff and allow them to search notes company-wide.
- ✓ **Personalized Home Page**
Okay, I cheated here, Google has already posted that [this will be coming](#) and they even [have a help menu](#) setup for this already. Essentially this option will allow you to customize the home search page for your employees to a limited degree locking certain areas of their Google start page.
- ✓ **Google Reader** ([more info](#))
This is a free RSS viewer that allows you to subscribe to and label RSS feeds such as [The SEO Blog](#). I believe this application will be added to Google Apps, or at least should, so that Administrators can keep their employees up to date on their own company's blog as well as their competitors'. In addition, RSS feeds are a great venue for continued education for anyone in a company; I constantly use them to keep up to date on the latest website analytics tutorials and upcoming web technologies. Ultimately, it would be great to enforce the viewing of certain RSS feeds for employees; much like locking areas of their personalized Google home page.
- ✓ **Google Spreadsheets** ([more info](#))
Create your spreadsheets online and share them across your enterprise.
- ✓ **Google's Writely** ([more info](#))
Create documents online, share them and publish them to your website.

So You Have More Questions About Google Apps? Well!

I tried to cover a lot in this article but I likely missed something so here is a direct link to [Google's help/FAQ area](#) for this new service.