

The Enterprise Cloud

# Google Apps v. Office 365: Content and document management

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**Takeaway:** Ian Hardenburgh compares the content and document management features between Microsoft's SharePoint Online (in Office 365 plans) with analogous features in Google Apps.

Previously, in my ongoing series comparing Google Apps and Office 365, I've compared several feature groups, beginning with their [basic productivity applications](#), and moving on to their [e-mail and messaging](#) and [calendar](#) line of products. In this segment, I will compare various aspects of each one's content and document management software, mostly in regard to features that have at least some overlapping properties, as the two services can be noted as being inherently dissimilar in approach.

SharePoint Online, which can be bought as a standalone, but is included in various Office 365 plans, is a slightly stripped down version of Microsoft's on-premise version of SharePoint 2010, and aims to bring teams of users together on a single platform in order to collaborate on shared productivity (MS Office) documents, improve management of those documents, and provide tools to design relevant business content and streamlined workflows in well-coordinated spaces. By no means is Google Apps able to say the same, at least for one single application. One has to use a combination of Google Docs, Google Apps' Sites service, and to a certain extent, Google Drive, so that they achieve an analogous set of features to SharePoint Online. However, even in doing this, one might find that not only does Google Apps fail to meet with certain standards that larger enterprises demand, but also a certain level of continuity and hegemony that SharePoint users are used to. As rigid as this may sound, it actually helps to create a more cohesive and familiar setting (enterprise users hate surprises).

So why even make a comparison between Google Apps to Office 365 in terms of document and content management when most have probably heard the story of David and Goliath before? Well, for one, Google Apps might be noted as being a more than acceptable solution for smaller enterprises, and to a certain extent, more appropriate when a person considers the time and cost it takes to administer a SharePoint deployment. In fact, as good a product as I think SharePoint is, I'd be so bold to say that most organizations don't fully utilize the majority of features it offers. Secondly, an organization is afforded the ability, in many respects, to customize Google Sites to purpose a lot of those features that come out of the box with SharePoint Online. Although this might be a stretch, one can theoretically use the Google App Engine and Google Drive to at least create rudimentary components akin to SharePoint Online. Furthermore, an organization can also tie in applications from the Google Apps Marketplace, in order to provide tools for activities like project, task, and contact management. However, I'll save this for another post.

The features that Google Apps and Office 365 — or I should say, Google Sites and SharePoint online — have most strikingly in common, concerns Sites' wiki style pages schema and SharePoint's My Sites and My Profile components. Again, Google Apps leaves much to the imagination of its authors, while SharePoint Online makes use of templates and universal composites known as web parts, which can be modularly controlled and assigned users permissions. If this is all an organization is looking to get out of a site, without

much need for SharePoint Online's document management or content design tools, such as its intranet and public-facing website sites, I might be inclined to say that Google Apps is the better choice of the two; probably because of cost savings alone. On the other hand, if your organization is committed to efficaciously solve interpersonal communication issues and drive productivity, there's no competition, SharePoint Online is the clear winner.

## Here are the primary feature areas that I cover in the chart

- Document co-authoring/collaboration
- Document navigation and search
- Document change alerts
- Mobile documents
- Offline document sync
- Content collaboration and task management
- Domain sites
- Social content tools
- Content data backup

The chart is very detailed, so for those who prefer a version to save to the desktop and manipulate, you can [download the Excel chart](#). If you prefer to view a snapshot version, click the thumbnail below to open to full-size.

## Comparison of Google Apps v. Office 365

Feature		Google Apps App/Service		Office 365 App/Service		Google Apps/Office 365 Suitable Enterprise Size			Comparison
						Small	Med.	Large	
Document Management	Co-Authoring/Document Collaboration	Google Docs	N/A	Office Web Apps	GA/365	365	365		This feature was discussed in my very first Google v. Office 365 series post entitled Google Apps v. Office 365: Head-to-head comparison of features, in terms of functionality. I noted Google Apps as having just as many benefits as Office Web Apps co-authoring does. However, Google Apps lacks a centralized place to list documents that are often used for collaborative purposes alone. Yes, one can share documents with colleagues within Google Docs, relatively speaking, but SharePoint Online holds features better suited for enterprise search. For instance, one can store metadata about a co-author, as well offer greater transparency as to who edited what by way of components like its backstage view.
	Navigation & Search		Google Drive		GA/365	365	Neither		To not only be able to organize and then navigate and search ones own documents is a difficult task, but to be able to navigate and search others documents is a feat in itself. Google Docs has always had adequate search tools to search your personal documents. However, it makes little distinction as to which documents are your own, versus those that are shared. More explicitly, it doesn't do much in terms of user metadata, nor in the way of content search. Google Drive has added an additional layer of search as one now has the ability to use his/her operating system search utility, since Google Drive is essentially like a shared drive on ones desktop. On the other hand though, SharePoint Online is much better suited for enterprises in the way sub-sites must be created from hierarchal and taxonomized top-level sites, which makes for better indexing, in terms of human intellectualization and programming. Also, with document libraries, one can easily distinguish between documents owned by oneself, owned by someone else, and those documents that are co-owned. However, even though I'd note on-premise SharePoint as "large" enterprise-ready, SharePoint Online doesn't support what is known as FAST Search, which does exactly as the name suggests.
	Alerts		Sites Lists/Gmail		GA/365	365	365		In Google Apps' Sites service, one can create a list with a specified amount of columns where every time any user creates a new entry, an e-mail is sent to the list author. Although I can see this being useful in certain applications, it isn't customizable. In fact, I use Sites myself, and I can't seem to figure out how to turn this feature off. With SharePoint Online on the other hand, not only can one receive alerts when a specified user or group of users make a change to a document or list, colleagues also have the added ability to subscribe to RSS syndication feed.
	Mobile		N/A		SharePoint Workplace Mobile "Locations"	GA/365	365	365	SharePoint Online sites can be viewed using a number of different mobile phones, even non-Windows based platforms like Blackberry, iPhone and Android. One can even use Office Web Apps to edit documents. Google has done a really poor job providing support for both mobile document navigation and editing. Essentially, you're at the whim of the browser your phone or tablet device supports, that may or may not have functionality similar to a browser installed on a PC. Android has started to support an Android version of its Chrome Browser, which addresses this issue, but this has yet to see widespread support.
	Office Sync		N/A		SharePoint Workplace 2010	365	365	365	Users have the ability to work with SharePoint Online offline (I know, something of oxymoron) and be ensured that the next moment they have a connection to their company network, they're sites, libraries and/or lists will be automatically synced. One can work with certain types of Google Docs documents offline, but I see this as something almost entirely different. Especially when you consider that SharePoint Workplace 2010 offers a complete desktop experience that is very similar to being on SharePoint itself.
Content Management	Collaboration and Task Management	Google Sites	N/A	SharePoint Online		365	365	365	Google Docs and/or Google Sites can be leverage to do many things, for both small and large enterprises alike. But they are definitely not the thing, content collaborative in any means. It is really amateur hour when it comes to this feature Google Apps. On the other hand, Team Sites have been a SharePoint staple ever since its inception, and things are no different with SharePoint Online. Your organization/team/group can connect with one another and not only collaborate on documents and other files, but post announcements, calendar items, schedule meetings, maintain tasks, host discussions, track issues or action items, easily store information in various lists, etc. You can also create sub-sites from a number of site templates where it might make sense to address a division in thought or activity. Various types of workspaces can be created to plan, organize, and capture the results of a meeting and/or tasks. A Contacts Web Database is available to manage information about people that your team works with, such as customers and partners. Most Team Sites components integrate well with Microsoft Outlook, where one can manage processes from within SharePoint Online or Outlook interchangeably. This is especially useful for certain activities like project milestones.
	Domain Sites		N/A		Intranet and Public Sites	GA/365	365	Neither	With Google Sites, there is no limit to the amount of sites a company can create. That is, at least beyond site quotas. To be quite honest, if one has the creative spark, he or she can create a more than suitable company intranet site that meets with some of the more common intranet type needs, such as the means to post announcements, resource and document links, and what have you. Where Google Sites really falls short is its ability to provide in-app HTML and CSS design tools. I've used Google Sites on a regular basis, and the editor for manipulating site content is just abrasive and crude. Although it is possible to setup a domain over the Internet pointing to a Google Sites site, Google Sites might better noted as a tool for internal company use only. As opposed to Google Sites, SharePoint Online comes equipped with ready-made and customizable intranet and public-facing sites. The intranet site functions very similar to a My Site or Team Site. The only difference is that it comes with web parts and templates that are better geared for an intranet-like environment. The public-facing site, meaning a site that is able to be reached by external users over a public domain, functions quite differently from your ordinary SharePoint site collection. This isn't necessarily a bad thing as it comes with a design tool called Site Designer for enhanced customization and branding. However, even Microsoft attests to SharePoint Online not being well suited for complex and high-traffic scenarios, so users need to address this concern during the planning stages of a SharePoint deployment.
	Social		N/A		My Sites, My Profiles, Person Search, Blog, Wikis...	GA/365	365	365	SharePoint Online users hold the ability, if given the permissions, to create their own site to share their personal information and professional expertise. In return, colleagues can follow one's latest activities and updates using notes and activity feeds. The My Profile page (part of My Sites) contains information about employees, which can include biographies, job titles, location, contact information, interests, skills, etc. SharePoint users can then search for a person by skill or simply look people up phonetically, in order to share relevant content and address interpersonal needs. Users can also share and consolidate company-wide information into centralized-easy-to-manage blog and wiki repositories. One can use a rich text editor, embed dynamic content and media, and take advantage of recently improved commenting, editing, and content management features, such as social tagging and ratings. In all fairness, Google Sites probably holds the ability to do everything mentioned above, only in a roundabout way. First off, Google Apps administrators can first enable a user to create multiple Sites websites, where they can customize it to function like a wiki or blog, or even embed Blogger posts into a Google Sites page. To one extent, this added flexibility might be welcomed in certain organizations, but will certainly take a lot of pedantic planning and policy-making in order to prevent users from running amok. Maybe this is something most larger enterprises wouldn't dare embark upon. However, if I've ticked your fancy, read my Google Sites as an enterprise intranet platform post.
	Data Backup		N/A		N/A	365	Neither	Neither	Microsoft provides data protection services to prevent the loss of SharePoint Online data. However, backups are only performed intermittently, and only stored for something like 14 days. One can use on-premise SharePoint and BCS to perform backups on a more regular basis, but we're straying the course here. Google Apps currently doesn't provide a backup solution. One can experiment with products like Eclipse, where an app engine plugin can be used, but again, we're straying the course. Obviously, both have some work to do in this arena if they want to grab some serious attention from larger enterprises who have compliance concerns to think about.

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