

The Enterprise Cloud

Google Apps v. Office 365: Email and messaging

By [Ian Hardenburgh](#)

May 14, 2012, 11:29 AM PDT

Takeaway: Ian Hardenburgh continues his in-depth comparison of Google Apps and Microsoft Office 365 office suites. In this segment, he compares the email and messaging features of both.

Previously, I did a [head-to-head comparison of the Google Apps and Office 365 basic productivity applications](#) as part of a planned series of posts that seeks — as far as possible — to differentiate these cloud-based office suites and help decision-makers to evaluate which suite, if either, may best suit your business needs whether you are a small, medium, or large enterprise. In this segment, I will compare the features of each one's email and messaging apps in as much detail as possible.

Communication is an integral part of any organization. Central to this role is email, and to a certain extent, various types of digital messaging (e.g., instant messaging). Google's mail server and user application, Gmail, and Office 365's online equivalent to Microsoft's on-premise Exchange Server and Outlook software, are arguably the two leaders in email networking and personal information management. However, the two services diverge in many ways. Central to this claim is that while Google remains unwavering in its quest to remain utterly cloud-based, Office 365 still relies heavily upon its on-premise software, such as Exchange Server and Active Directory. Google does this as well in a few cases, but it is really just due to migration/adoption purposes (as with migrating users from an LDAP server). Nonetheless, this isn't necessarily a bad thing for Office 365, as hybrid cloud solutions can be said to be the best strategy going these days, as enterprises look to slowly transition their data and infrastructure to both on-demand and PaaS/IaaS type spaces.

In the attached chart, I review some of the more notable features of Gmail and Exchange Online, mostly in terms of that which is required by enterprise-class servers in traditional, on-premise data centers. Although some features, such as the sheer ability to organize and search for email messages and personal contacts are covered here, these capabilities are all but an afterthought these days as desktop clients and standards/open based file formats like Personal Storage Table files have become status quo. Secondly, toward the bottom of the chart, I examine messaging, or Google Apps' various new-age communication tools that help to complement your more traditional email messaging, against Lync Online, a Microsoft product still in its infancy.

Here are the primary feature areas that I cover in the chart for email:

- Space/User allowances : Max number of users, storage space, message sizes, etc.
- General organization and navigation
- Filtering, search, e-discovery capabilities
- Contacts and mailing lists
- Directory
- Migration
- Mobility

- Desktop client
- Security
- Policy and compliance
- Networking

Here are the primary areas covered for messaging:

- Chat/video conferencing
- SMS/Voice
- Social

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](#) here. If you prefer to view a snapshot version, click the thumbnail below to open to full-size.

Comparison of Google Apps v. Office 365

				Google Apps/Office 365 Suitable Enterprise Size				
Feature			Google Apps App/Service	Office 365 App/Service	Small	Med.	Large	Comparison
E-mail	Space/Allowances	Users	Gmail	Exchange Online	GA/365	GA/365	GA/365	Both services offer the ability to host an unlimited amount of users. However, with Exchange Online, you'll have to pay a slight premium for this luxury.
		User Storage			GA/365	GA/365	Neither	Both Gmail and Exchange Online offer a comfortable 25 GB per user, which pretty much comes standard with any edition. Although this should be more than enough space for most users, regardless of industry or requirements, archiving may become an issue with large enterprises due to corporate governance (see Policy/Compliance feature below for alternative solution, if this is a concern).
		Attachment/Message Size			GA/365	GA/365	Neither	Both Gmail and Exchange limit their message size to 25 MB. Might be deemed a little low.
		Max Recipients (Per Day/User)			GA/365	GA	Neither	Both Gmail and Exchange Online cap the number of per message recipients to 500. Gmail allows 3,000 outside of domain messages per day, but doesn't put a quota on messages sent within an organization's own domain. Exchange Online limits total messages to just 1,500 per day, regardless of domain. Obviously Gmail beats Exchange Online on the domain factor, but neither address the demand most medium and large enterprises have for e-mail campaigns, where it's not unordinary to e-mail tens of thousands of prospects on a daily basis. Yes this can be handled through other (integrated) services or custom applications, but both fail to make the grade in terms of ease-of-use and addressing this all important business need.
	Mailbox Organization, Navigation and Reminders				GA/365	GA/365	365	Exchange Online is strikingly similar to the Outlook 2010 desktop client, and uses its classical approach to mailbox organization and navigation by way of folders, follow-ups and reminders. Gmail on the other hand uses the same labeling system that Google Docs does and is probably the more forward-thinking of the two on-demand interfaces. And although most either love it or hate it, it serves as just as, if not better, of a means for e-mail/messaging organization and navigation as Exchange Online or Outlook does. On the other hand, Gmail doesn't support reminders, at least from within the online service which one would think is a requirement for the majority of e-mailers these days. This is why I reluctantly recommend Exchange Online, based on the lack of this single feature alone. It's surprising how long Google has gone without addressing something you'd think would of been included in one of earliest releases of Gmail years ago.
	Filtering, Search & E-discovery				GA/365	GA/365	GA/365	Both services allows for multi-mailbox e-discovery and have ample search tools. I find Google's Postini service to be both faster and more flexible. Contrarily speaking, I really like Exchange's catch-all mailbox for receiving e-mails to an unknown mailbox within a domain. However, Exchange Online doesn't have the agility that Gmail filters offers users. I'll give this feature to Gmail.
	Contacts & Mailing Lists				GA/365	GA/365	365	Both services have their advantages when it comes to contacts and mailing lists. While Exchange Online boasts its usual global address, as well as new features like dynamic (query-based) distribution lists, Gmail has some nice features of its own, such as with its integration with Google Groups. However, due to the per day user caps, it makes it hard to really get behind any service. I give a slight edge to Exchange Online though due to its ability to connect with Dynamics Online, where one can handle e-mail campaigns if the occasion arise.
	Directory				GA/365	GA/365	GA/365	Google Apps Directory allows for syncing with LDAP servers like Microsoft Active Directory and Lotus Domino. Of course, Exchange Online can sync with an on-premise instance of Active Directory too.
	Migration				GA/365	GA/365	GA/365	One can migrate to Gmail from a multitude of sources, such as Lotus Notes, Exchange Server 2003/2007/2010, as well as IMAP servers like Novell's GroupWise and other Gmail deployments. Exchange Online can also be migrated from Exchange Server 2003/2007/2010, as well as any IMAP-based e-mail system too. We'll call this one a push.
	Mobility				GA/365	GA/365	GA	Gmail has the ability to connect to BlackBerry Enterprise Server and Microsoft's ActiveSync, and virtually any major phone device via Google Sync. It touts enhanced support for Android devices (duh), which can be administrated through a multitude of well designed management tools/utilities. Exchange Online on the other hand is really only supported on Windows and Blackberry devices. Who wants to use a Blackberry anymore, and who ever used a Windows phone. Okay, that was a dig; Gmail still gets this one though.
	Desktop Client				Not Needed	GA/365	GA/365	One can configure Outlook 2010 desktop software for Exchange Online, as well as other (earlier) versions of Outlook, including Outlook for Mac 2011 and the Outlook Web App (stupid right; why wouldn't you just use Exchange Online). Gmail supports IMAP and POP, so it can be configured with most e-mail clients. It also can be used offline with the Gmail Offline app (see Chrome Store). If cost isn't a concern, and a desktop client is a must, I might be so inclined to say go with Exchange Online as it is a more stable connection. Note, small enterprises shouldn't need a desktop client and can make due with both SaaS-based interfaces.
		SSL/Encryption			GA/365	GA/365	365	Aside from optional HTTPS connections to Gmail, Google's Message Encryption service, powered by Postini, provides a policy based solution (content-based encryption) to comply with governance regulations. Outlook Anywhere allows users to connect to Exchange Online with having to establish a VPN tunnel, through a SSL-secured tunnel, using the RPC-over-HTTP Windows networking component. Exchange Online also supports POP3 and IMAP SSL for traditional TCP-based encryption for connections between clients and exchange online. Furthermore, it supports S/MIME messages and even third-party

	Security					encryption, such as with PGP. Although Information Rights Management isn't provided through Exchange Online, it can be managed through an on-premise instance of Active Directory. To sum it all up, both services can achieve the same level of encryption, but Google is a little hush-hush as to how they go about doing this. Therefore, weight has to be given to Exchange Online.	
		Spam & Virus Protection		GA/365	GA/365	GA/365	I could go on about each services spam and virus protection methods. However, when it comes to spam, the best way to tell how effective a service's spam filtering is, is by experiencing it first hand. Having used both, I'd have to say Gmail is more effective in prevention, but might be a little over zealous. On the other hand though, Gmail doesn't delete certain threats at the gateway, so who knows if I should of received that all important message stating that I've actually won the lottery (fat chance right). As far as virus protection goes, just know that both services boast guaranteed virus protection in their SLAs. That's good enough for me considering that in my experience, virus protection is the biggest IT racket going these days. BTW, Exchange Online uses Microsoft Forefront Online Protection for Exchange (FOPE) Administration Center as its security layer.
		E-mail/IP Address Blacklisting		GA/365	GA/365	GA/365	Both services can moderate incoming and outgoing messages based on IP, e-mail address and domain. You could probably achieve a bit more with Exchange Online by providing what are called granular transport conditions, as well as classify messages to take a certain course of action.
	Policy/Compliance			GA/365	GA/365	GA/365	With the Google Apps Vault add-on, custom filtering, content policies, admin configured compliance footers, message retention/archiving and audit logs are all available. Auditing is also available from directly within Exchange Online, as is advanced role or access control permission reporting and records management.
	Networking			GA/365	GA/365	365	Google's mail server allows administrators to configure e-mail routing for messages sent to unknown mailboxes. Gmail also supports inbound/outbound gateways and outbound relay. Exchange Online, coupled with Forefront Online Protection for Exchange (FOPE) Administration Center is a Behemoth when it comes to this stuff. It supports anything from simple address rewrite to SMTP delivery of e-mail messages sent from fax gateways, network appliances and custom applications. No surprises here given Exchange's long history; Exchange Online wins flat-out.
Messaging	Chat/Video Conferencing	Google Talk	Lync Online	GA/365	GA/365	GA	Google Talk is the same Google Talk application one can notice with the free Gmail service, which hosts some nice features like status updates, file transfer, voice and video chat. However, with the Google Apps Vault add-on, chat message archiving is also available, which can be a must for certain enterprises requiring a certain level of governance and oversight. With Exchange Online, instant messaging can be provided through its Lync Online service, which like Google Talk, can be used from mobile devices. However, Lync Online doesn't integrate easily with other Office 365 services like Exchange Online, as you think it would. Lync Online does offer audio and video conferencing, but now we are venturing into on-premise territory.
	Voice/SMS	Google Voice		GA	Neither	Neither	Google Voice is a relatively new service that allows for both PC-to-PC and PC-to-phone calling with the ability to also send and receive text messages (think about the opportunity for service-oriented organizations that have workers in the field). The service can work in conjunction with Google Talk's Video Chat browser plugin. Although the future looks bright for this service, as it looks to immerse itself deeply into Gmail, Google Talk and even Google+, it's yet to prove itself on enterprise terms. That's more than Office 365 can say though, because Lync Voice & PBX software is only available for on-premise Lync 2010.
	Social	Google+; Sites; Blogger	N/A	GA	Neither	Neither	Administrators can enable the Google+ social networking service, as well as take advantage of Google Sites and its blogging service - Blogger. However, take these apps for what they worth, because Google isn't out promoting them as part of their core offering. On the other hand though, if your company is forward-thinking enough, and can leverage these services to enhance communication amongst its peers, all the power to you.

You May Also Like

- [Five comparisons and five contrasts between Google Apps and Outlook.com](#)TechRepublic
- [Get started using Google Drive for document sharing](#)TechRepublic
- [How Mind-Controlled Devices Will Change Our Future](#)Qualcomm
- [My Warning on the 25th Anniversary of Black Monday](#)Profit Confidential

about these links