



Report on the CGIAR Google Apps Case Study – January 2009

‘Google Apps is a great solution for our geographically distributed researchers to help them achieve our mission by easily sharing and collaborating online with colleagues and partners’

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ABOUT GOOGLE APPS

Google Apps is a suite of applications that includes Gmail, Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Talk (instant messaging and voice over IP), Google Docs & Spreadsheets (online document hosting and collaboration), Google Sites (team site creation and publishing), Start Page (a single, customizable access point for all applications), Google Video, and Google Security & Compliance. The CGIAR uses the Google Apps Education Edition, tailored specifically for K-12 schools, colleges, universities and non-profit institutions.

For more information, visit www.google.com/a

The CGIAR's mission is to achieve sustainable food security and reduce poverty in developing countries through scientific research and research-related activities in the fields of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, policy, and environment.

Challenges

The CGIAR is a consortium of 15 geographically dispersed research centers. To support efficiencies and innovation across the CGIAR System, it was decided to explore alternatives to existing collaborative platforms, striving towards platform-independent systems that could help reduce the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and at the same time allow users to innovate with improved collaborative tools and services.

Case Study Objectives

The CGIAR Google Apps case study was a joint initiative of the CGIAR IT Managers and the CGIAR ICT-KM Program.

The case study's main objectives were to test Google Apps (including *Google Mail*, *Google Calendar*, *Google Documents*, *Google Sites* and *Google Start Page*) and to evaluate the overall performance of using Software as a Service (SaaS) as a means to improve the user experience of staff in remote offices and those on travel duty; enhance business continuity; and reduce the TCO. The study also aimed to evaluate how well SaaS would fit across the CGIAR Centers.

Why Google Apps?

Google Apps was selected as an online hosted service because of the various user-friendly tools/services listed above, and also because it is an SaaS-based solution –

Google hosts the application and users access it through a web browser.

Initially, this delivery model was known as an application service provider (ASP); however, the term "software as a service" (SaaS) is more commonly used today. SaaS is different from software in that instead of having to purchase a license, enterprises subscribe to the service on a pay-as-you-go basis.

The Context

❖ Selecting Participants

The case study team, which developed an initial workplan to carry out the Google Apps study, asked the CGIAR IT Managers to propose candidates from their respective Centers and/or invite users interested in testing these tools. The team recommended that at least half the users from each Center be non-IT department staff – given that IT personnel are usually technical people capable of solving many of the problems that a layperson can only find answers to by consulting peers or a helpdesk. It was also suggested that frequent travelers and 'deskbound staff' be part of the test group.

❖ Participants/Timeframe

The case study ran from 24 June to 15 September 2008 and covered 14 Centers and 262 participants, who were provided with the opportunity to test *Google Mail* and other Google applications and collaboration tools.

❖ Support Materials

A *Google Site* was created where all participants had access to the step-by-step case study test suggestions, FAQs and training material. The *Google Site* is basically a Wiki that allowed participants to share their comments and experiences online.

Data Collection

Two questionnaire surveys were circulated during the case study. Questionnaire 1 was an initial baseline survey designed to get to know the participants, while Questionnaire 2

was the final Google Apps case study survey intended to gather feedback and measure user satisfaction.

Case study results

Data were collected from the participants through the initial baseline survey, the *Google Site* and the final end-user satisfaction survey. 60.4% of the participants who answered the final survey expressed their satisfaction with the Google Apps experience, and 64.3% of the users said they were likely to recommend Google Apps for the CGIAR.

Google Documents, a suite that can be used by users requiring basic office and collaboration functions, will not replace Microsoft Office in the CGIAR. However, the two applications can work well together. For example, *Google Documents* can be used to write documents collaboratively online (and offline, if required, using *Google Gears*) while maintaining a history of changes, and Microsoft Office can be used to provide the final professional look of the document

Google Sites, a Wiki-type tool that allows users to easily set up collaborative websites to share information, such as that arising from team projects, can also be used help organize meetings and community groups. Best of all, though, anyone can create a *Google Site* and embed documents, calendars, photos, videos and gadgets directly into its pages and share it with either a few people or with the world.

Although Google Mail (Gmail) has many great features such as a powerful search, built-in chat, a "conversation view" similar to an Internet forum, calendar and a large storage space that is constantly being increased by Google, the fact remains that it has a limited rich text editor, doesn't have offline functionality out of the box, and can't be seamlessly integrated with the CGIAR's current Global Address List, all of which are major showstoppers that prevent the CGIAR from implementing Gmail as the official corporate email standard. However, the advantage of an SaaS like Google Apps is

that new changes are being constantly implemented and offline functionality is a feature that can be expected to be made available soon.

It was decided at the IT Managers Meeting 2008 that, for the time being, Gmail was not ready to replace our current Microsoft Exchange infrastructure. Nonetheless, the ICT-KM Program will keep an eye on this technology since Gmail was found to be a potential low-cost alternative for those Centers that would like to provide users with a cgiar.org pass-through account and a Gmail mailbox instead of an Exchange account.

Conclusions

Given that the level of user satisfaction in the final survey was more than 60%, the ICT-KM Program is now working on a follow-on project to deliver a Google Apps Education Edition production platform to CGIAR users. The main purpose of this platform will be to give users access to the collaboration tools included in the Google Apps package. The Gmail functionality will also be included as an opt-in/opt-out service that may be implemented following guidelines that the implementation team will produce in collaboration with the CGIAR IT Managers. This project will also include the migration of relevant content from cgmail.org (the test domain) to the new domain, and provide good practices, support and training for the various CGIAR communities.

Contact Us

If you have any questions about the CGIAR Google Apps case study and the future implementation of Google Apps, please contact us at cgxchange@cgiar.org

