

Should Lawyers Choose Google's G Suite or Microsoft's Office 365?

by Sharon D. Nelson, Esq. and John W. Simek

© 2017 Sensei Enterprises, Inc.

More and more companies and law firms are moving to the cloud and not in a small way. *BetterCloud* reports that by mid-2017, large enterprises are expected to have adopted 52 Software as a Service (SaaS) applications on average. In last year's survey, 14% of G Suite organizations and 5% of Office 365 organizations ran 100% of their IT in the cloud. It shouldn't be a surprise that those percentages are expected to increase. By 2020, it is expected that 50% of G Suite organizations and 34% of Office 365 organizations will be running 100% of their IT in the cloud. The message is that the cloud is here to stay, but what does that mean for law firms? Should lawyers move to Google's G Suite or Microsoft's Office 365? This is a question we are asked more and more by audience members when we lecture – it has begun to recur so often that it finally occurred to us that it might be a useful article.

Cost and security are certainly considerations. Traditionally, lawyers would purchase a license for Microsoft Office and perhaps skip a version or two before upgrading. The out-of-pocket costs would be minimized and you would use the software for at least five to seven years. The problem is that you have to have your computer with you as well as your data. Moving to the cloud gives you much more flexibility with regards to mobility and access to your data pretty much any time and any place with an Internet connection. Moving to the cloud with G Suite or Office 365 puts you in a subscription model, where your expenditures will occur on a regular (e.g. monthly) basis. Over time, out-of-pocket costs will be higher than purchasing a retail copy of the software. Of course, the decision for cloud versus on premise only applies to Office since G Suite is a cloud-only offering.

In 2007, Google launched its enterprise cloud suite called Google Apps Premier Edition. It was later renamed to Google Apps for Work and rebranded as G Suite in September 2016. In a February 2016 study, Gartner (a research and advisory firm) noted:

"Among public companies using cloud-based email, Microsoft is more popular with larger organizations and has more than an 80 percent share of companies using cloud email with revenue above \$10 billion," said Jeffrey Mann, research vice president at Gartner. "Google's popularity is better among smaller companies, approaching a 50 percent share of companies with revenue less than \$50 million."

Google was very successful in convincing customers to move to the cloud, primarily for e-mail services. Microsoft had an offering called Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS) that wasn't very reliable, which helped Google win over customers that previously used Exchange. The competition really heated up when Microsoft launched Office 365 in June of 2011. Office 365 is a logical move for current Microsoft customers that want to move to the cloud. As Gartner pointed out, G Suite is probably more appropriate for small to medium businesses, whereas Office 365 tends to be used more in large enterprises.

The following table from petri.com (www.petri.com/battle-cloud-supremacy) summarizes the cloud applications that are available in each of the offerings.

	Google G Suite	Microsoft Office 365
E-mail	Gmail	Exchange Online
Calendar	Calendar	Exchange Online
Collaboration	Groups	Office 365 Groups Yammer
File Sharing	OneDrive for Business	Drive
Document Generation	Google Docs	Word
Spreadsheets	Sheets	Excel
Presentations	Slides	PowerPoint
Audio and video calls	Hangouts	Skype for Business
Intranet	Sites	SharePoint
E-Discovery	Vault	Security and Compliance Center

Google and Microsoft have migration utilities to help you get your data into the cloud with relatively little effort. Both offerings work well with different browsers and support a range of mobile devices. Microsoft and Google also support working offline. Microsoft has Outlook for access to e-mail, calendar and groups and OneDrive for Business for offline access to anything (e.g. documents, spreadsheets, presentations, etc.) stored in OneDrive. Offline access for G Suite requires that you use the Chrome browser and gives you access for Gmail, Calendar and Google Docs.

If you are a solo or small firm attorney, manageability may not seem to be very important. However, you should be asking yourself “How will you manage Office 365 or G Suite users?” Office 365 has better management tools and integrates with Active Directory. Another advantage of Office 365 is support for hybrid environments, which means you can migrate slowly or even use some cloud services while still maintaining some functions on premises. As an example, you can move your e-mail to Exchange Online while still using Word on your computer with files stored on your server. Over time, you could then move your data to OneDrive while still using a local installation of Word. Finally, you can then migrate completely to the cloud using Word in Office 365 while your data files are stored on Microsoft servers in the cloud. In contrast, G Suite is cloud only so you don’t have the option for a slow and measured transition to an off premises solution.

Security is always a concern for lawyers in order to provide protection of client confidential information. Both G Suite and Office 365 are very secure in protecting data in transit and at rest. In fact, Google and Microsoft probably provide better protection of data than most law firms. Google and Microsoft support Information Rights Management (IRM) and Data Loss Protection (DLP). Microsoft is a little better than Google since IRM and DLP are available to other data and not just e-mail. In addition, Microsoft rights management templates provide additional protection controls over e-mail and documents through Office 365 Message Encryption and transport rules.

Cost is a concern for most lawyers, but especially solo and small firm attorneys that have limited budget for technology. G Suite is cheaper than Office 365, but the Google choices are much more limited than Microsoft’s. The basic version of G Suite only costs \$5 per user per month and is limited to 30 GB of storage. You also get a business e-mail address with your domain name. It also includes video and voice calls, integrated online calendars, online text documents, spreadsheets and slides, easy to create project

sites, security and admin controls and 24/7 phone and e-mail support. For only \$10 per user per month you get everything in the basic version plus unlimited storage, advanced admin controls for Drive, message retention policies, audit and reporting insights for Drive content and sharing, easy searching and exporting to different formats, the ability to archive all e-mails sent by your firm and to place and enforce litigation holds on inboxes and Google Vault for e-discover covering e-mails, chats, docs and files.

Microsoft has many more options and features available to the user. There are versions of Office 365 that only include e-mail all the way to full blown productivity suites. Most attorneys should sign up for the Office 365 Business Premium plan for \$15 per user per month or \$12.50 per user per month with a one year commitment. The Business Premium plan includes e-mail with a 50 GB storage limit, 1 TB of file storage and fully installed Office applications on up to five devices per user. Users that want to include e-mail encryption (in addition to other data protection and archiving) should go with the Office 365 Enterprise E3 offering for \$20 per user per month with a one year commitment. The low cost entry point is definitely an advantage for G Suite, especially if you are just looking for basic functionality. Microsoft is the clear choice if you are looking for something other than just basic office productivity apps.

If you are considering a cloud first strategy, then G Suite may be a good fit. Office 365 is a better choice to provide a slow and measured transition to the cloud. If you are a heavy Windows user, then Office 365 would be the logical choice. If you operate in a mixed environment or are a heavy Mac shop, G Suite may be a good starting point. Cloud infrastructure is another consideration. Users of Amazon Web Services (AWS) or Google Cloud would be better served with G Suite. Azure users would be candidates for Office 365.

Microsoft's Office 365 will be the choice among most lawyers since they are already familiar with Office installed on their computer. According to Microsoft, one in seven people use Office today, which equates to 1.2 billion users. Google isn't far behind with more than one billion users accessing Gmail each month. The younger generation seems more likely to be using G Suite than Office 365. Some research firms attribute this to the increasing popularity of Chromebooks with apps built in. Since younger employees are growing up with Chromebooks, they are more likely to continue using G Suite as they enter the work environment. That is not to say that new attorneys will flock to G Suite as their base productivity tool.

Law firms generally use a lot of the features in Word and Excel, which further supports the decision for Office 365. Lawyers need a lot of flexibility when formatting documents. G Suite may be rather limiting for most lawyers needing advanced capabilities for such things as styles, table of authorities, redlining, bullet hierarchy, etc. Office 365 has the benefit of years of development coming from the locally loaded Office suite. The longtime development of the Office suite has other advantages as well. Other application providers have a long history of integrating with Office. Integration with case management, document management, document assembly, time and billing and even Outlook add-ins has been around for a long time. Office 365 continues with that tradition. If your other applications currently work with the Office suite, chances are they will also work with Office 365. G Suite isn't as fortunate, but there may be some work arounds available. As an example, some case management software can work directly with Gmail while others only integrate with Outlook. You can access your Gmail from Outlook, but that puts another piece of software in the middle just to integrate your e-mail with the case management application.

In contrast, Google has always been great at allowing integration with third party apps to manage your calendar items. However, the calendar itself wasn't very smart, but Google is changing that. Google Calendar now has the ability to see when third parties and colleagues are free on the Android and iOS apps. Exchange and Outlook users have had this feature for years and Google is just now catching up. Also, a feature called Quick Access in Google Drive on Android uses interactions with your colleagues and your calendar to determine which files are the most relevant to you at any particular time. Think of it as artificial intelligence for your data.

Though Google is ahead of Microsoft when it comes to machine learning, we think the majority of lawyers will opt for Office 365 instead of G Suite even though it costs more. The primary drivers are the integration with other applications they use in the firm (e.g. practice management), familiarity with the features of Word, Excel, etc. and the ability to expand the offering with additional products such as SharePoint, e-mail encryption and e-discovery tools.

When we give presentations, it has been our assessment that solos are more likely to use G suite. The larger the firm, the more likely it is to use Office 365. Online commentators have declared Office 365 the clear winner in head to head competition for all of the reasons given above. The pesky cost difference does not seem to deter lawyers from choosing Office 365.

And anytime you get a chance to read anything written or presented by our friend Ben Schorr on Office 365, take advantage of the opportunity. He is our go-to guy and a compendium of knowledge about Office 365. If we were to move our company completely to the cloud, we would (without hesitation) choose Office 365 over G Suite.

The authors are the President and Vice President of Sensei Enterprises, Inc., a legal technology, cybersecurity and digital forensics firm based in Fairfax, VA. 703-359-0700 (phone) www.senseient.com