

# Wonder web

Office professionals have a new mantra to make their day's work more efficient - work online, save online BY TIM STACKPOOL

There are a number of services that allow collaboration between authors without the need for emailing endless versions of the same document between various members of the team.

Apart from the obvious advantage of a single document version being shared and modified by a team of collaborators, such online services also represent a recognition of the mobility required by today's business, and offers a new and different perspective on document security. Previously, updated copies of important documents stored on the CEO's laptop while on the road could fall victim to a dreaded hard-drive failure, baggage mishandling or theft. Alternatively, composing, storing and modifying documents online brings with it a level of security, as well as the level of efficiency demanded by today's corporate enterprise.

## Project management

You would be hard pressed to find any computer in the office that doesn't already have a popular word processor and spreadsheet installed. It's almost an expectation to see icons for programs like Microsoft Word and Excel on any PC. But how do you manage a project where multiple contributors in different locations need access to the same Word document or Excel spreadsheet? There are a number of services that allow collaboration between authors without the need for emailing endless versions of the same document between various members of the team. For example, Microsoft's Office Live Workspace (www.workspace.officelive.com) allows the facilitator of a project to upload any Office document to a common free online workspace. All members of the team can then open, view and edit the documents without having to save a local version. Better still, if you merely want to preview the documents, no Microsoft Office applications are required to be installed on your computer, almost any web browser will do. One major advantage of this Microsoft offer is a feature called SharedView.

This allows all collaborators to watch changes being made to a document by a colleague in real time. The service is currently in 'beta testing' which means all the features are available, however the development team is still making improvements to the service and feedback is always welcome.

## Work better

Similarly, long term player Zoho (www.zoho.com) has made available a complete suite of more than 15 online office-type software applications for free.

Unlike Microsoft's current offer, Zoho requires no word processor, spreadsheet or other similar applications to be installed directly on your computer to make use of the



online composing and sharing. You can create and save documents, spreadsheets, presentations, project planners and more, without ever downloading a specific piece of software.

Better still, you can export and email the documents in a format readable by regular desktop programs, including Acrobat PDF. Zoho also includes other complimentary online business solutions such as meeting reminders, tasks notes and a powerful customer relationship management (CRM) tool which covers sales and marketing modules, inventory management, customer support processes, and financial reporting. This feature is perfect for very small businesses on a tight budget as the service is free for no more than three online users. Even for large outfits adding extra CRM users costs less than \$20 per year per user. The service further enhances your productivity by synchronising to your existing Microsoft Outlook and Zoho also has a version for mobile phone access.

Not to be outdone, Google has its own version of online document collaboration, called Google Docs (docs.google.com). Like Microsoft, Google's offer remains in beta-testing for now, but they have also chosen to stick with only the big three office applications: a word processor, a spreadsheet and a presentation tool. These applications are similar to Zoho in that no extra software is required. A web browser is all you need to create documents, share them with collaborators and save them as regular documents or in a variety of formats. Like the others, Google Docs is also currently a free service. So now you can streamline all your office practices without pushing the budget sky high.

