

Reinventing the Business Workspace

How Salesforce.com and Google are Bringing On Demand to the Enterprise

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Contents

- Introduction2**
- New ways of working enabled by the Web2**
- Retooling the business workspace2**
 - Embracing the fabric of the Web 3
- Powered by the best of the Internet.....4**
 - Effortless fusion 5
 - Enterprise ready..... 5
 - A new breed of third-party applications..... 6
- Bringing work and business into the Web era6**

About the author



Phil Wainwright is one of the world's foremost authorities on emerging trends in business automation. He is a prolific writer with a ZDNet blog on Software as a Service, the Loosely Coupled website on enterprise adoption of services architecture, and a series of influential analyst reports to his name. He serves as CEO of Procullux Ventures, a London-based strategic consultancy to leading business automation vendors and their customers.

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Introduction

The business workspace is going on demand. A new, connected way of working is breaking down the old, functional silos of activity that kept workers isolated in their desktop cubicles. Rippling across the modern, Web-enabled workplace, it links people wherever they work and collaborate – in workplaces, virtual spaces, meeting rooms, and mobile devices.

This tide of change, driven by mobile and Web connectivity, is gathering strength from the rise of Internet-based business automation. At the crest of these twin trends, Salesforce for Google™ Apps reinvents the business workspace for the Web-connected enterprise, showing how on-demand applications can combine to create productive, adaptable information sharing and workflow.

New ways of working enabled by the Web

The Web brings everything closer together. It collapses distance and automates interaction, giving us on-demand access to information, people, and suppliers wherever they are. This ready availability is changing the way we work and do business. We expect real-time information, we engage in instant conversations, we form teams that straddle international borders and time zones, and we source goods and services from wherever we can discover the best timeliness and value.

We're only starting to unravel the long-term impact of these developments. The workplace is becoming virtual – no longer tied to a single office location or the 9–5 working day. We work in virtual teams, collaborating across time and distance wherever we are. Co-workers are sub-contracted from other firms for the unique value or specialist expertise they bring. Business relationships are “pay by result,” and everyone's compensation is linked to performance. These changes are redefining the nature of work and the workplace.

No wonder we now expect our computing to be on tap in exactly the same way. The Web teaches us that business applications should be ready to use right away, all operate in the same connected environment, and be readily adaptable to our needs. There's no time to stand still any more. Today's real-time workflows demand a better way to automate our work than the old fixed-function application silos of previous computing eras.

Retooling the business workspace

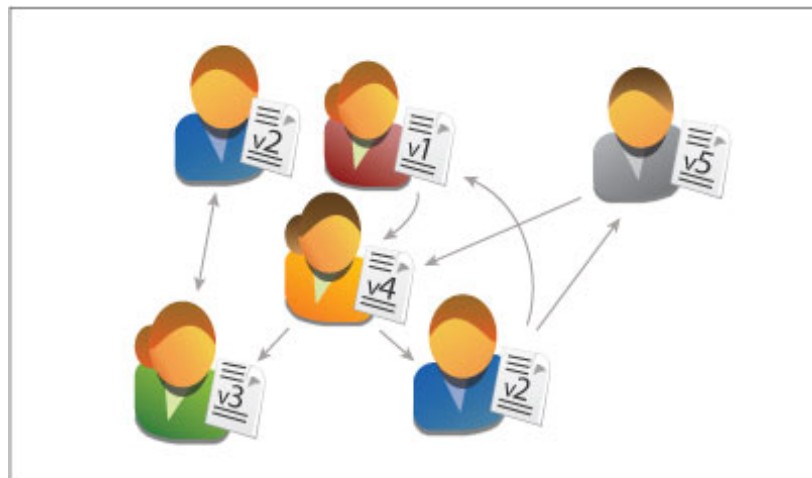
The old model of computing, designed for the intermittent connections of an earlier age, obstructs the free flow of work in three distinct ways:

1. The traditional software we use to create and edit documents and messages is designed for individuals working alone at their desks. There are no inherent capabilities for real-time collaboration, sharing, or mobility. We're forced to pass around documents, spreadsheets, and presentations as email attachments, with no easy way to keep track of who has the latest version.

2. We work in line-of-business applications, such as a customer relationship management (CRM) system, to interact with customer and supplier information. To set up appointments, deal with email, or edit documents, however, we have to switch over to our desktop applications. This change interrupts the flow of work, making it harder to get things done or to get hold of the right information fast enough.
3. All these separate pockets of functionality are isolated from the outside world, making it harder to collaborate with outbound workers, business partners, customers, and prospects.

Most workers find these types of disconnections hugely frustrating, causing wasted effort and lost productivity:

- Having to juggle several different calendar systems because customer appointments are stored in the CRM system, but internal meetings are recorded in a workgroup calendar.
- Looking up contact details in one application, then opening a separate application to send an email or share a document (as an email attachment, of course).
- Finding there's no easy way to work out exactly which proposal or sales pitch a given prospect saw because several different versions are in circulation.

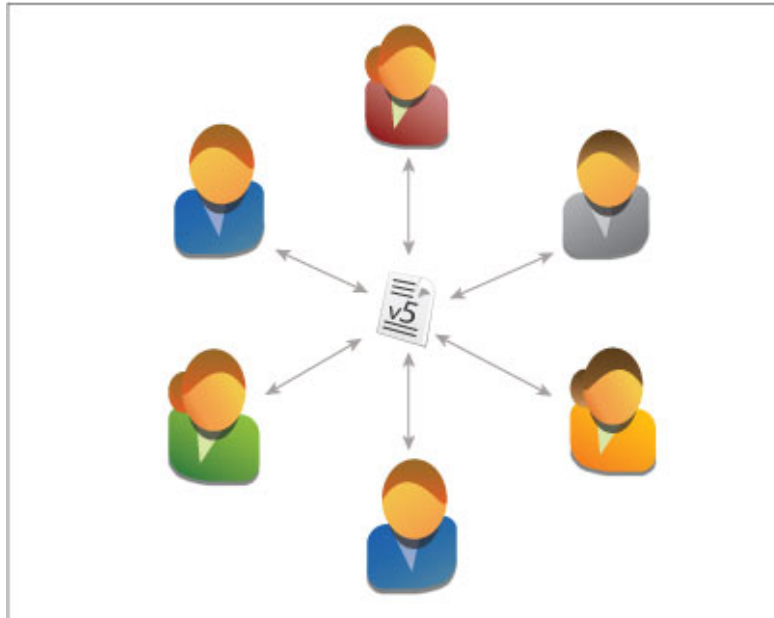


Embracing the fabric of the Web

The fast-paced interaction of the Web demands a different approach – one that embraces the mobility, the real-time information flows, and the linking and embedding that make up the fabric of the Web. There's no reason not to build documents, workflow, and collaboration directly into the enterprise workspace, making them instantly available precisely when and where they're needed. That's what today's workers expect, and they're increasingly frustrated at the inability of their computer systems at work to deliver the same easy integration and standardized user interface they experience when using the Web.

This capability is what Salesforce for Google Apps delivers. A fully integrated, on-demand workspace lets workers take advantage of real-time connections on the Web within an enterprise framework:

- A customer services administrator can have all relevant documents and conversation records at his or her fingertips when interacting with a customer instead of having to search in a separate application for emails, contracts, or quotes.
- A team negotiating a sales contract online with a prospect can backchat with colleagues over instant messaging (IM) within the same workspace – and optionally save relevant dialog from the IM stream to the prospect’s contact file.
- A product manager, account executive, and technician based in different offices can collaboratively edit a presentation before going out on a joint customer call.



In many organizations, employees are already adopting these Web-based methods of communicating and sharing information via third-party IM clients, personal Web phones, online email accounts, and so on. By integrating Web-based collaboration into the enterprise workspace and making it part of the existing workflow, the organization can regain control and ownership of those interactions.

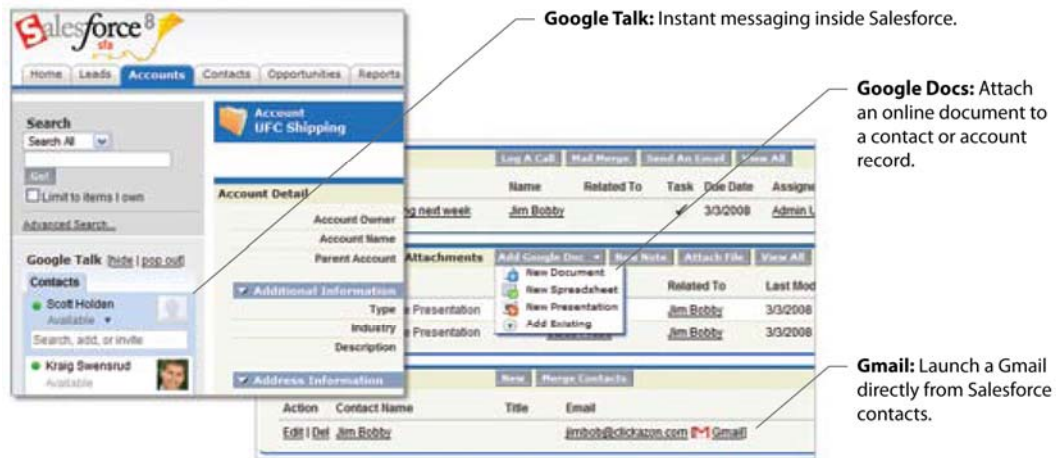
Powered by the best of the Internet

The on-demand model of Software as a Service (SaaS) is a key enabler in retooling the enterprise workspace to meet the needs of today’s Web-enabled workers.

On-demand platforms are designed from the ground up to operate in the Web environment, with its standardized linking and embedding based on HTTP, the foundation architecture of the Web. Just as HTTP allows Web pages to link to each other without affecting their performance or contents, so the programming interfaces built on HTTP allow on-demand applications to link easily and autonomously. This capability goes beyond the simple “mashups” that have been popularized in recent years, such as combining location data with Google Maps. Today, it allows far more sophisticated combinations of workflow-enabled business functionality to create an enterprise-class, on-demand workspace.

Effortless fusion

Salesforce for Google Apps brings this effortless, non-invasive integration to life. The full suite of Google Apps – including Gmail, Google Calendar, Google Talk, Google Docs (word processing, spreadsheets, and presentations), and Google Start Page – is instantly available to any Salesforce customer that chooses this option. Once activated, every component of Google Apps becomes an integral feature of the Salesforce environment, available as a natural part of the user's working routine.



Despite this organic fusion at the user interface, each application remains programmatically autonomous and can add new features or upgrades – such as extensions to Google Apps' recently introduced offline working capabilities – without requiring any modification to the integration. Compare this approach, for example, to integrating Salesforce with Microsoft Outlook, which requires separate installation of a software download that must be reinstalled every time Outlook is upgraded to a new version.

Enterprise ready

Designed for the enterprise market, the two application stacks cater to key enterprise considerations such as security, compliance, and accountability:

- The Google Apps collaboration and productivity suite allows the definition of document templates and stylesheets governing corporate style.
- Access and usage policies are managed within each application, and access rights management can be delegated to individual users. This functionality enables granular control – for example, allowing users to invite customers or partners to view specific documents while protecting more sensitive data.
- All usage is governed and monitored by administrator consoles for each application stack, and ownership of all archives remains assigned to the enterprise so that, for example, if an employee leaves, his or her documents, conversations, and email archives remain within the organization.

A new breed of third-party applications

The Internet-based development ethos of the underlying Force.com platform allows partners and enterprises to add customized business functionality into the Salesforce for Google Apps workspace. With this capability, you can link information and workflow to other on-demand applications or develop your own custom applications.

Avoiding the custom development dead-ends of conventional software, Force.com stores customization as changeable metadata rather than rewriting the underlying program code. In the on-demand model, these customized applications still retain the flexibility and seamless upgrade paths of the underlying components. That approach increases reusability of custom components and fosters the emergence of a flourishing ecosystem of third-party offerings that complement the core applications.

Bringing work and business into the Web era

The business workspace is ripe for reinvention to leverage the opportunities of today's Web-connected, real-time world. The instant adoption and viral reach of the on-demand model is about to unleash that transformation as an unstoppable surge.

Salesforce for Google Apps is instantly available to the combined customer base of Salesforce.com and Google Apps – and to any other business that signs up online for either service. Those who activate the capability will soon discover how natural it is to create and edit documents and email online in the collaborative workspace. Early adopters have already seen how infrequently they return to their old desktop productivity applications because of the ease with which they can move between the Salesforce line-of-business application and the Google tools. What's more, their habits are transmitted virally out to all their contacts when they invite others to share documents. This process brings new users into contact with the on-demand Google Apps and reinforces the online habits of colleagues in the same organization.

Salesforce for Google Apps thus becomes a catalyst for introducing workers and the workplace to Web-enabled ways of working, enabling more businesses to adapt better and faster to the on-demand workspace. Spreading virally as it seeps imperceptibly into everyday work habits, Salesforce for Google Apps unleashes an irresistible, ubiquitous, transformative tide that will challenge conventional notions of the workplace and redefine how work and business get done in the Web era.