Google Suite

Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Google Slides are a word processor, a spreadsheet and a presentation program respectively, all part of a free, web-based software office suite offered by Google within its Google Drive service. The three apps are available as web applications, mobile apps for Android and iOS, and desktop applications on Google's ChromeOS. The apps are compatible with Microsoft Office file formats. The suite also includes Google Forms (survey software), Google Drawings (diagramming software), Google Sites (web building software), Google My Maps (map overlay editor), Google Apps Script (code editor for the G-Apps Script coding language) and Google Fusion Tables (database manager; experimental).

The suite allows users to create and edit files online while collaborating with other users in real-time. Edits are traked by user with a revision history presenting changes. An editor's position is highlighted with an editor-specific color and cursor. A permissions system regulates what users can do. Updates have introduced features using machine learning, including "Explore", offering search results based on the contents of a document, answers based on natural language questions in a spreadsheet, and dynamic design suggestions based on contents of a slideshow, and "Action items", allowing editors to assign tasks to other users.

While Google Docs has been criticized for lacking the functionality of Microsoft Office, it has received praise for its simplicity, ease of collaboration and frequent product updates.

History

Google Docs originated from two separate products, Writely and XL2Web.

Writely was a web-based word processor created by the software company Upstartle and launched in August 2005. It began as an experiment by programmers Sam Schillace, Steve Newman and Claudia Carpenter, trying out the then-new Ajax technology and the "content editable" function in browsers. On March 9, 2006, Google announced that it had acquired Upstartle.

XL2Web was a web-based spreadsheet application developed by 2Web Technologies, which was acquired by Google in 2005 and turned into Google Labs Spreadsheets. It was launched as a test for a limited number of users, on a first-come, first-served basis on June 6, 2006. The limited test was later replaced with a beta version available to all Google Account holders, around the same time as an official announcement press release was issued.

In September 2007, Google released a presentation prgram for Google Docs, which originated from the company's purchase of Tonic Systems on April 17, 2007.

In July 2009, Google dropped the beta testing status from Google Docs.

In January 2010, Google Docs started allowing users to upload any file type up to 250 MB, with 1 GB of free space and paid storage available for $0.25 per GB per year. This cloud storage feature was eventually reworked when Google Drive was introduced in 2012. Google Drive now serves as the cloud storage service from Google, while Docs, Sheets and Slides serve as the office suite inside Google Drive.

In March 2010, Google acquired DocVerse, an online document collaboration company. DocVerse allowed multiple user online collaboration on Microsoft Office-compatible document formats such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Improvements based on DocVerse were announced and deployed in April 2010.

In June 2012, Google acquired Quickoffice, a "leader in office prodctivity solutions", with particular emphasis on Quickoffice's "seamless interoperability with popular file formats".

In October 2012, Google Documents, Spreadsheets and Presentations were renamed Google Docs, Sheets and Slides, respectively. At the same time, Chrome apps were released, which provided shortcuts to the services on Chrome's new tab page. Google announced in August 2016 that support for Chrome apps would end on Microsoft Windows, Apple macOS, and Linux computers between 2017 and 2018.

Platforms

Google Docs, Sheets and Slides are available as web applications supported on Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer, Microsoft Edge, and Apple Safari web browsers.

Users can access all documents, spreadsheets and presentations, among other files, collectively through the Google Drive website. In June 2014, Google started rolling out dedicated website homepages for Docs, Sheets and Slides that contain only files created with each individual service.

In 2014, Google launched dedicated mobile apps for Docs, Sheets and Slides for the Android and iOS mobile operating systems.

In 2015, the mobile websites for Docs, Sheets and Slides were updatd with "simpler, more uniform" interfaces for each, and while users can read files through the mobile websites, users trying to edit will be redirected towards the dedicated mobile apps, thus preventing editing on the mobile web.

Features

Editing

Collaboration and revision history

The suite serves as a collaborative tool for cooperative editing of documents, spreadsheets and presentations in real-time. Documents can be shared, opened, and edited by multiple users simultaneously and users are able to see character-by-character changes as other collaborators make edits. Changes are automatically saved to Google's servers, and a revision history is automatically kept so past edits may be viewed and reverted to. An editor's current position is represented with an editor-specific color/cursor, so if another editor happens to be viewing that part of the document they can see edits as they occur. A sidebar chat functionality allows collaborators to discuss edits. The revision history allows users to see the additions made to a document, with each author distinguished by color. Only adjacent revisions can be compred, and users cannot control how frequently revisions are saved. Files can be exported to a user's local computer in a variety of formats (ODF, HTML, PDF, RTF, Text, Office Open XML). Files can be tagged and archived for organizational purposes.

Explore

Launched in September 2016, "Explore" enables additional functionality through machine learning.

In Google Docs, Explore shows relevant Google search results based on information in the document, simplifying information gathering. Users can also mark specific document text, press Explore and see search results based on the marked text only.

In Google Sheets, Explore enables users to ask questions, such as "How many units were sold on Black Friday?", and Explore will return the answer, without requiring formula knowledge from the user.

In Google Slides, Explore dynamically generates design suggestions based on the contents of each slide.

The "Explore" features in Docs follow the launch of a more basic research tool originally introduced in 2012.

In December 2016, Google introduced a quick citations feature to Google Docs. The quick citation tool allows users to "insert citations as footnotes with the click of a button" on the web through the Explore feature introduced in September. The citation feature also marked the launch of the Explore functionalities in G Suite for Education accounts.

In June 2017, Google expanded the Explore feature in Google Sheets to automatically build charts and visualize data, and again expanded it in November to feature machine learning capable of automatically creating pivot tables.

Suggested edits

In June 2014, Google introduced "Suggested edits" in Google Docs; as part of the "commenting access" permission, participants can come up with suggestions for edits that the author can accept or reject, in contrast to full editing ability.

Action items

In October 2016, Google announced "Action items" to Docs, Sheets, and Slides. If a user writes phrases such as "Ryan to follow up on the keynote script", the respective servie will intelligently assign that action to "Ryan". Google states this will make it easier for other collaborators to see which person is responsible for what task. When a user visits Google Drive, Docs, Sheets or Slides, any files with tasks assigned to them will be highlighted with a badge.

Add-ons

In March 2014, Google introduced add-ons; new tools from third-party developers that add more features for Google Docs and Google Sheets.

Offline

In order to view and edit documents, spreadsheets and presentations offline on a computer, users need to be using the Google Chrome web browser. A Chrome extension, Google Docs Offline, allows users to enable offline support for Docs, Sheets and Slides files on the Google Drive website.

The Android and iOS apps natively support offline editing.

#### Google Summary

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