



## ICT HUB CASE STUDY – THE WEB BASED OFFICE

### **Organisation name:**

London Advice Services Alliance

### **Summary:**

This case study was conducted in February 2007, and explores the potential for web-based tools to be used for everyday office use – such as email, calendars, contacts and document writing.

The experiment was inspired by [IT Redux's Office 2.0](#) and the [Dot Organize 'Organizer's Toolcrib'](#) of online tools, the aim being to find out just how easy or hard it was to apply online tools to everyday tasks. This meant no more Outlook for email and calendar, Word or Excel and using only online tools to do the same jobs.

### **What happened?**

The web office experiment ran for 2 weeks, during which all office tasks were conducted using free online tools.

### **Web Office tools used:**

- Address Book: [Plaxo](http://www.plaxo.com) www.plaxo.com
- Bookmarks: [del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us) http://del.icio.us
- Calculator: [Google](http://www.google.com/help/features.html#calculator) www.google.com/help/features.html#calculator
- Email: [Gmail](http://mail.google.com) http://mail.google.com
- Calendar: [Google Calendar](http://www.google.com/calendar) www.google.com/calendar
- Documents and Spreadsheets: [Google Docs](http://docs.google.com) http://docs.google.com and [Thinkfree](http://www.thinkfree.com/main.jsp) www.thinkfree.com/main.jsp
- File Manager: [Box.net](http://www.box.net) www.box.net
- Images: [Flickr](http://www.flickr.com) www.flickr.com
- Personalised homepage: [Google](http://www.google.co.uk/ig?hl=en) www.google.co.uk/ig?hl=en
- RSS Reader: [Google Reader](http://www.google.com/reader) www.google.com/reader

**Email:** Email is at the heart of daily tasks and we chose Google's Gmail service because it offered lots of functionality and is designed to integrate with other Google services, such as Google Calendar, Maps, and Mobile. Setting up email forwarders from our office Outlook account to Gmail was relatively easy. However, breaking the habit of using Outlook for email was far more difficult than expected, mainly because Gmail's major weakness is its management of contacts.

Ease of switching: 6/10



**Calendar:** We had no problem making Google Calendar the centre of our web office as it offers lots of functionality, with the ability to create and share multiple calendars, set reminders and auto responders. After importing our office calendar into Google as a CSV file, we used SyncMyCal to Synchronise appointments between Google and Outlook.

Ease of switching: 9/10

**Contacts:** We use contacts every day and went for Plaxo because it offered better functionality than the contact management found in Google's Gmail service, and automatically synchronised with Outlook contacts, notes and tasks. Plaxo also has a large user base, making it more sustainable than many other online contact managers.

Ease of switching: 6/10

**Documents and Spreadsheets:** We started out using Zoho, which performed well on short documents without much formatting. However, Zoho struggled on a 40 page strategy document with complex formatting and we soon switched to ThinkFree because it offered better document management facilities, editing and display of complex documents. ThinkFree also offered offline editing, handy working in areas without an Internet connection.

For collaborative document sharing, Google Docs was the clear winner – documents are easily shared, it allows simultaneous editing by two or more users and document revision are clearly tracked.

Ease of switching: 8/10



### ***What difference has ICT made?***

- Online tools can be accessed from anywhere with an Internet connection and a device with a web browser. This frees users up from being tied to one location and means they can access their files from anywhere.
- After some experimentation we were able to match the right online tool against the office task. Certain office tasks – email, contacts and calendar - are well suited to the web office, and can be set up by a small organisation with a little technical knowledge.
- We were also able to collaborate simultaneously with colleagues on documents – this could be useful for joint funding bids, working on newsletters, etc.



### ***What was learnt?***

The experiment demonstrated that mainstream take up of web office tools is still some way off because of major barriers to adopting new technology:-

- Many VCOs are reluctant to think about using ICT differently
- MS Office is heavily embedded in the sector's use of ICT and there is little incentive to change
- Experiment and find the right web-based tool for the office task
- Email, contacts and calendar are well suited to the web office
- Pick a sustainable vendor of web-based services
- Security – are you happy entrusting your data to a third party, most likely based in a country with different privacy laws?

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### **FIND OUT MORE:**

#### ***Organisation's web address***

London Advice Services Alliance:  
[www.lasa.org.uk/](http://www.lasa.org.uk/)

#### ***Regional Champion***

Miles Maier – London Regional Champion (Lasa)

Email: [mmaier@lasa.org.uk](mailto:mmaier@lasa.org.uk)  
Web: [www.lasa.org.uk/ictchampion](http://www.lasa.org.uk/ictchampion)

#### ***Knowledgebase***

Web 2.0 – the Internet upgraded:  
<http://www.ictHubknowledgebase.org.uk/web2>

Making web 2.0 work for charities:  
<http://www.ictHubknowledgebase.org.uk/makingweb2workforcharities>

Web 2.0 and accessibility for disabled users:  
<http://www.ictHubknowledgebase.org.uk/web20andaccessibility>