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Living in the Cloud - Storing and Accessing Your Files Online

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Benefits

- **Access** – The services described below allow you to upload your documents to the internet. Once uploaded, you can easily access your documents from just about any device, including your iPad, and from nearly any location (home, work, and more).
- **Integration** -- Most of the services described below integrate into popular mobile apps like Docs to Go and GoodReader. Save a document to the service from your desktop or laptop, then read and/or edit it on your mobile device.
- **Share** – Cloud services allow you to share folders or individual documents. You can share with designated users, or make your document public for anyone to access.
- **Revisions** -- Many of these services track document revisions and document history. See what's changed

Issues

- **Security** – Storing documents in comprehensive services like Google may make users more vulnerable because hackers who manage to break into a Gmail account will likely have access to that user's Google Docs, for example. Choose the service with the features that best match your needs.
- **Privacy** – When you upload a document to a cloud service, you are entrusting the privacy of that document to the company. Some services can encrypt documents, meaning a special code is needed to read them. But even encrypting doesn't ensure privacy. For example, DropBox generates its encryption code on its own servers, meaning it is theoretically possible for DropBox to read your documents. Documents stored on SpiderOak, on the other hand, are encrypted on the user's computer. SpiderOak does not have access to the code needed to read them.
- **Permanence** – Can be sure that the document you upload to a cloud service will always be available? Not exactly. If your Gmail account is compromised, for example, you may lose all of your documents. Additionally, if a company is suspected of supporting piracy, all of its servers may be shut down. For example, many businesses and private users stored legitimate files on Megaupload, but all users lost access to their files when the company was seized by the FBI.

Cloud Services

These are some of the more popular services for storing documents.

DropBox (http://dropbox.com)

Great for accessing files on any computer and many mobile devices; not recommended for documents which require high security.

- Free accounts: 2 GB; can be increased with the referral program
- Paid accounts: 50 GB for $9.99/month ($99/year), or 100 GB for $19.99/month ($199/year).   Larger-scale accounts also available.

Box.net (http://box.net)

Similar to DropBox; popular for its business applications.

- Free accounts: 5 GB (note that file sizes are limited to 25 MB).
- Paid accounts: 25 GB for $9.99/month; file size up to 1 GB; larger-scale accounts with additional features also available.

Google Docs (http://docs.google.com)

Store and access docs in your Google account; Google Docs also includes online apps for document editing, spreadsheets, and presentations.

- Free accounts: 1 GB storage (limit does not include docs created using Google Docs apps)
- Paid accounts: 20 GB for $5/year (accounts up to 16 TB also available); file size up to 10 GB

SugarSync (http://sugarsync.com)

Popular service for syncing folders from your computer to the cloud, making those files available from any location.

- Free: 5GB
- Paid: Plans start at 30 GB for $4.99/month ($49.99/year) up to 500 GB ($39.99/month, $399.99/year).

SpiderOak (http://spideroak.com)

Provides greater security than most other services; works more like a back-up service than a file storage service.

- Free accounts: 2 GB; can be increased with the referral program
- Paid accounts: 100 GB for $10/mo ($100/year)

iCloud (http://icloud.com)

Integrates cloud storage services into iOS and Mac software and applications; not as versatile as general apps like Box.net, DropBox, and SugarSync.

- Free: 5 GB
- Paid: $20 per additional 10 GB per year (up to 50 GB).

More information

Brent Rose, "The Best Way to Store Stuff in the Cloud," *Gizmodo*, Sept. 28, 2011, available at http://gizmodo.com/5828035/the-best-way-to-store-stuff-in-the-cloud. Reviews 10 popular cloud services.