

# Web-Based Tools That Increase Your Productivity and Save Money

*How to get started with free tools...today!*

## How can you grow your business this year without growing your staff?

In a recent poll conducted during an Appfolio webinar we asked property managers if they were planning to add more properties this year and if they were planning to increase their staff to accommodate an increased workload. The majority said they are planning to add more properties but only a few said they would be adding more staff. This article outlines the value of web-based software – how it can save you both time and money, and how to take the first step by moving your email from a traditional server to an online email service.

## First off, why would you even consider using web-based software? How could it save you time and money?

One of the best ways to understand it is to compare web-based with traditional software. Usually people think that traditional software is the best approach because once you buy it you own it...forever. And then you're done! Zero additional investments are needed. But that isn't always the case because there are a number of hidden costs that end up taking your time from your revenue-producing activities. Some examples of these hidden costs:

1. Installing the software takes time and often consultant resources to customize and configure the application
2. Periodic software upgrades to the newest / best version are typically not included and cost extra
3. You have to purchase licenses for everyone in your office and if you add users, you have to pay for them
4. You will need to purchase a server if you want multiple people to access the technology. Costs are installation and occasional consultant fees for fixes, upgrades, etc.
5. Training costs both time and money. Traveling to the course, paying for the course and the lost time while everyone is out of the office.
6. If you're using a property management software, migrating the data from one system to another is expensive and time consuming.
7. Ongoing support when issues arise is typically an additional charge.

The examples above are primarily illustrating the hidden dollars you have to spend for ownership of traditional software. But the biggest hidden cost is truly the time you and your staff spend when the software doesn't work as it should or you need to train a new team member or the software needs upgrades or maintenance. This is time that you could be spending acquiring more properties, working with owners and managing your tenants.

## How is web-based software different? Why are so many software companies moving to web-based offerings?

With web-based software the Internet is the server. This means:

- Access your data from anywhere at anytime – from home, from the office, on a vacation, from your PDA device (Blackberry, iPhone, etc).
- No longer pay extra for support and upgrades, they are usually included
- No need to purchase, maintain or upgrade server hardware
- Typically training is included and applications are intuitive and easy to use



## An easy place to get started: Move to a free web-based software like Gmail.

Most property management professionals use Microsoft Outlook for email & calendaring systems. This is great while you're in the office but once you leave, you no longer can easily access your email or calendar. It can also be expensive to pay for an email server like Microsoft Exchange so multiple people in your office can view shared calendars. When the email server goes down work often comes to a standstill – without the ability to communicate using email your staff often has to wait until the server is restored to complete important tasks. A simple first step is to move your email to an online provider like Gmail ([www.gmail.com](http://www.gmail.com)) so you will have access to your email from anywhere – work, home, vacation or on the road. Gmail is secure and easy to use and a great example of the value of web-based software. In addition, once your office is using Gmail you can set up a shared calendar that is accessible and viewable by all members of your staff. With Gmail you have the option to use the free basic service or pay a minimal fee to use your own domain (@company.com).



Best of all, it is very easy to get started. Go to [www.gmail.com](http://www.gmail.com) and select "sign up for Gmail" and you can follow the instructions provided. You will find that you can do all of the same basic email functions as it is very much like the email systems you're accustomed to using on a daily basis. There are two main differences: 1) You can access this email and calendar from anywhere... if you're on a beach in Hawaii with a computer with Internet access you can get your email! 2) You can potentially get rid of your email server and save some money each month.

Here are a few suggestions on where to get started and see how using Gmail might work in your daily life.

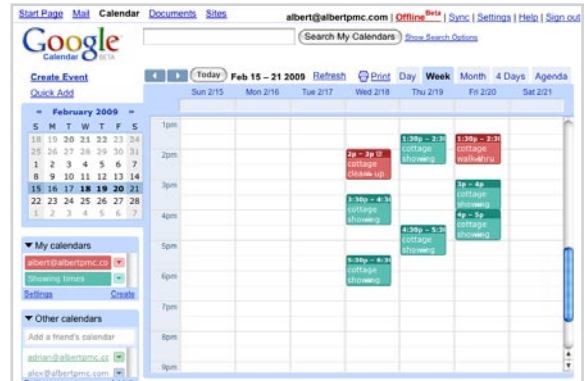
1. If you already have an email account you can start by forwarding your emails to your Gmail account. You can get used to the Gmail interface and access your email from any location.
2. You can automatically import your contacts into Gmail – this is a quick way to have your address book of contacts available to you from any location.
3. You can also configure Gmail to receive email on your PDA (Blackberry, iPhone, etc) so you can access email while on the road ([www.google.com/mobile](http://www.google.com/mobile)).

(More detailed video tutorials on how to do this are located at [www.appfolio.com/edu](http://www.appfolio.com/edu)).

## Taking the next step: Google Calendar

Now that you have a Gmail account you have more flexibility – you can receive email at Gmail.com and can access it from anywhere: home, work, vacation, blackberry / portable PDA device. And you can begin to use the calendaring function. Setting up a coordinated calendar system using the Microsoft exchange server can be very complicated but sharing Google calendars is really simple. Some ideas on how you can use shared Google calendars in your office:

1. Share calendars among your staff so everyone can see each other's schedules. This makes it so much easier to schedule tenant or owner meeting as you can see the availability of your entire team. Simply invite other people in your office to view and collaborate using the Google calendar settings.
2. Create a shared office calendar of property showings. You could post this calendar to your website or simply use it as a tool for everyone in your office.



In addition to email and calendar Google also provides the capability to create shared documents, websites and online forms – and all of these web-based tools are free.

## Paying for web-based software is similar to paying for Property Management services.

But why do companies pay each month for a web-based service? In fact, this is very similar to the value proposition of a property management company. Why don't owners just manage their own properties? Because it is a service that saves the owner time and allows the owner to focus on his/her core areas of expertise which typically is not property management. Once you get started with these easy Google services you will experience how web-based services save you time and allow you the flexibility you need to run your business without increasing your staff. This is even more important during the current economic climate when you need to maximize every hour in your day. The world of software is changing and small and midsized businesses like property managers are in a position to take advantage of these technologies that used to be only available to larger companies.

(More detailed video tutorials on how to do this are located at [www.appfolio.com/edu](http://www.appfolio.com/edu)).