Transitioning to G Suite: What you'll miss and what to do about it

Is the Google suite right for your office? Check out this comparison of the three main programs before you make any moves.

Word to Docs

If you are a tech writer, Docs will not do it for you. Even if you just write complex reports, academic papers or RFPs, this list of what you won't have might be significant:

- Section breaks for varying headers or page-numbering schemes.
- Running a compare/combine with two documents to determine differences.
- Completing a mail merge.
- The research feature is the only way to add sources to cite. No Manage Sources function.
- Figure captions and tables of figures have to be created manually.

The good news is that, with the exception of section breaks and differing headers, there are usually add-ons that will beef up Docs to do most of what Word can do. A workaround would be to create individual documents where you might create an individual section. Then create another document where you've built a manual table of contents built from hyperlinks to the various files.

In general, don't expect graphics and other special objects to convert sanely when you go to Docs. You will need to tweak or recreate most letterhead and reposition pictures and drawings in order to continue editing them in Docs.

Excel to Sheets

The big hurt for advanced Excel users will be Sheets. Even add-ons, like the ones for Slicers, are often not a good substitute. Google has continued to beef up Sheets over the years, so eventually, we hope to be able to say that there is no measurable difference between the two platforms.

Connecting different Sheets files (workbooks are the equivalent in Excel) is not at all as straightforward. In Sheets, this needs to be done with the IMPORT-RANGE function, which connects to a specific hyperlink to the other Sheets files. The linkage is precarious and will be destroyed by a collaborator trying to open it in Excel.

In many organizations, there are a couple of Excel workbooks on which many corporate decisions are based. They are often complex and riddled with macros. While this is NOT a good thing from an internal controls standpoint, it is the way things are for many. Knowing in advance how these will convert should be done before finalizing a rollout project plan.

PowerPoint to Slides

Like Excel, Google keeps adding functionality to Slides. Not too long ago, there was no match for Microsoft Office SmartArt. Now Diagrams in Slides are catching up. Where does Slides fall short? Animations and transitions. Many might argue that these things are pure fluff. However, there are good reasons to apply these features, and the limited set available in Slides does not even come close. Most presentation creators don't use their apps properly to begin with and wouldn't be able to tell the difference. Like Excel and Word, PowerPoint simply is more feature rich and now offers additional options like screen recording and 3D object animation (Morph transition).

Bottom Line

- If you need the rich features of Office, G Suite will disappoint you.
- Basic functionality users will not really notice a difference.
- Google is making admirable strides to catch up.
- Spreadsheets are the biggest threat to transitioning from Office to G Suite, with email coming in a close second.

Staying Up to Date

Google is releasing new functionality all the time for G Suite. This is the reality for most SaaS (Software as a Service) platforms. And while they communicate with pop-up bubbles and boxes to point out new features, we are often clicking right through those so we can do what we want to do in that moment. Once a week or so, check out this site: https://gsuite.google.com/whatsnew. It will not only tell you what has been released that's new, but also what's coming up next and when.

Giants like Google know the wisdom of releasing new and changed features gradually to get ahead of any unplanned issues and to be able to support like groups of users at the same time.