Becoming an Information Expert Essay: Google Docs

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Introduction

Communication is key in all aspects of our lives. In order for us to achieve the tasks we must complete or engage in activities we'd like to, we must give and receive information. It is inherent in our nature, as long as humans are present, to utilize information. To aid us in our ability, we employ information technologies to help us capture, store, transmit, and process information. In our modern world, a lot of these technologies we observe are found as digital assets or devices that benefit us greatly. Certain information technologies can be predominantly found as extensions of computers or mobile devices we have created. One form of technology that has risen from this computer age is word-processing software. These software allow people to put down words, images, and hyperlinks into a singular document, saved on some form of storage. Although popularized by Microsoft Word, in my paper, I am going to detail information regarding the word processing software, Google Docs. This software is used only online via a web browser, referred to as "web-based", and was created by Google. This paper will dive into the intricacies of the purpose of such a software and what it can be applied to, the history of its development over the years, the impact it has had, and what the future might hold for the software. I am putting a focus on the software's advancements in terms of collaboration, efficiency in development of projects, and the writing process in both the working and educational space.

Analysis

Purpose

To first learn about Google Docs, we must understand its use and intent. As an information technology, it is capable of storing and transmitting information by allowing users to

put down words and images into an accessible document saved for them. What makes Google Docs stand out is its ease of access collaborative ability, integrated with other Google software. Users can simply create new documents and invite collaborators to either edit along with them or simply just view it. Editors can edit simultaneously, with a high frequency of data transmission that makes any conflicts on the document rare or unlikely (Dekeyser and Watson, 2006). A history of the revisions made on the page are also available, allowing users to see what has been changed. In Dekeyser and Watson's study, "Extending Google Docs to Collaborate on Research Papers", they determine that Google Docs is extremely beneficial to use as a means of creating papers or seminars. They find the interface to be efficient and effective in helping the user understand what tools they have at their disposal to create the documents they wish to build. As the software is available through web browsers, it runs through a "cloud", or a digital storage space available online. This allows for collaboration to happen quickly with numerous editors and viewers concurrently. Data collected from workers at Google showcase users are utilizing this ability, with 53% of documents created by workers in April 2013 were edited by more than one person (Sun, Lambert, Uchida, and Remy, 2014). Another feature that allows users to share ideas and to communicate more efficiently is the ability to create comments. Although not all users might edit and contribute their own work, they can still collaborate by sharing ideas using the comment tool; this is evidently highly used as 80% of the users at Google in March 2013 who worked on previous documents in April created comments (Sun, Lambert, Uchida, and Remy, 2014). All of this data collected in studies at Google as well as reports on the usability of the software in earlier years demonstrates that Google Docs as an information technology has a use in the world of documentation, with a strong intent to store information and be capable of communicating with a large number of people.

History

Now that we understand what Google Docs is capable of and what purpose it serves, we can understand its development and achievements as a technology. Google Docs, as I have mentioned, is a word processing software that is similar to other editing suites like Microsoft's Office software. The software originates from the 2005 easy-to-use word processor, Writely, which was quickly merged into Google and developed to become Google Docs in 2006 (McHugh-Johnson, 2021). An important aspect that was developed for this software is the degree of integration of other Google Apps (P. Darbyshire and A. Darbyshire, 2010). Allowing users to utilize the already heavily used Google Apps such as Gmail allowed collaboration to flourish naturally and more efficiently. Google Docs itself can contain more than just documents, allowing spreadsheets and presentations also available to be created. Users need to create a Google account to utilize the software at no price currently (Perron and Sellers, 2011). The software advanced its capabilities with the first major update in 2010, adding the ability to see others comments and writing on documents, syncing with the cloud together (McHugh-Johnson, 2021). The developers aimed to create an interface that was intuitive and easy to understand, full of options to help users collaborate and store documents. It is relatively effortless to access, requiring only internet connection with some basic computer understanding to navigate (Perron and Sellers, 2011). Now, it is used by all sorts of people, like teachers, students, researchers, and artists. With ease of access sharing and a simple interface, the software has remained relevant and as utilized since its release in 2006.

Impact

As we have observed, Google Docs is an important creation in the world of communication. I argue that Google Docs has helped revolutionize how we collaborate and work

on projects and papers. We've already seen in the purpose of it a great rise in collaboration at a company like Google, and another space that has emerged stronger in its use of Google Docs is educational environments. Tools that help engage students in a classroom to further connect with their work and peers can greatly improve overall enjoyment and productivity. Research done by Suwantarathip and Wichadee documented under the paper titled "The Effects of Collaborative Writing Activity Using Google Docs on Student's Writing Ability" shows that students, when compared to typical face-to-face interaction, will demonstrate a stronger performance in writing ability when collaborating using Google Docs. Google Docs gives them more options for collaboration, such as adding comments and reviewing previous editing history, which aids in student's acting more efficiently in their writing (Suwantarathip and Wichadee, 2013). The software allows more capability in terms of organizing ideas and thought, pushing more productivity as all students can work online synchronously and gather knowledge. While working on papers or projects, students also benefit greatly from the tools at hand for reviewing each other's work. A study done by Semeraro and Moore examining students as they peer review with one another, reported under the paper titled "The Use of Google Docs Technology to Support Peer Review", found that when sharing documents with other students to peer review using Google Docs, students reported comprehending information and recognizing improvements in their own work much better than without the software. Being able to efficiently collaborate on documents, utilizing highlighting, commenting, and revisions, critical analysis is improved and a better understanding of their own work arises (Semeraro and Moore, 2017). These two studies had both shown that Google Docs greatly improved student's experience in the classroom, but it is evident even outside of school. In the paper by Zhou, Simpson, and Domizi titled "Google Docs in an Out-of-Class Collaborative Writing Activity", a research study is

designed where students are given two assignments to work on outside of class following lectures and instruction; one is with Google Docs and one is without. By the end of the study, out of the 28 students, 68% reported Google Docs to be a useful tool to collaborate, alongside 79% reporting positive or very positive comments about the software (Zhou, Simpson, and Domizi, 2012). With a majority of students unfamiliar with Google Docs before using it on the assignment, the study demonstrated students were able to learn the software quickly and found it to be useful in completing the tasks. These studies demonstrate that Google Docs has remained an important tool in collaboration, showcasing enhanced learning, higher productivity, and stronger encouragement to work together.

Future

Understanding that Google Docs is an effective and dominant tool in the realm of collaboration seen in working and educational environments, I believe that the tool will continue to thrive in the future and has the potential to reach even wider audiences. Face-to-face collaboration can create natural conversation and development of ideas, but it can also inhibit the ability to all collaborate effectively at once and communicate faster, something Google Docs could make up for (Jung, Lim, and Kim, 2017). While people can only share ideas one at a time in face-to-face collaboration, Google Docs allows numerous people to all edit and share work at the same time, encouraging production of thinking and work. One issue cited in the study by Jung, Lim, and Kim titled “Possibilities and Limitations of Online Document Tools for Design Collaboration: The Case of Google Docs” is the lack of emotion or ability to create and draw. At its current state, the software is predominantly used for written word and collaboration for idea generation. I predict that it is very possible in the near future for Google Docs to add more features that allow stronger creative outlets of expression like drawing tools and voice messages.

This would greatly improve current usage of the software, as seen from one example of the personal diary style documentation done by the New York Times (Lucas, 2020). During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, journalists started a project where they could exchange information and messages on a document regarding advice and experience, trying to learn how to communicate ethos and empathy through written word. The software was a great tool to engage in sharing ideas and work on writing when physically separated from one another, and with even more visual tools added to the software, stronger emotions could be conveyed. It would also help students communicate with one another better when working on assignments in class, as more and more students are reporting using Google Docs to communicate and collaborate on assignments or simple conversations while in class (Lorens, 2019). Voice message features to coincide comments that users can create would improve production by sharing context and emotion to the words that are written. Moving forward, Google Docs has continued to hold itself up as one of the strongest word-processing software to date. With students and the workforce continuing to use it as a tool to communicate and collaborate, it is likely this software will remain utilized in the future and potentially implement more features that make collaborating even more enjoyable and efficient.

Conclusion

With communication being such an integral part of our daily lives, from school to work, it is no wonder information technology is developed to aid us in the transmission, capturing, processing, and storing of information. This paper dove into the importance of a notable web-based word processing software, Google Docs. The software has numerous features of highlighting, commenting, and sharing that makes collaboration of sharing ideas and revision of work fast and

effective. Google Docs began in 2005, developing its collection of tools and capability over the years and becoming more prominent, with all sorts of people using the software ranging from students and teachers to artists and journalists. Working and educational environments are greatly impacted by its use, allowing papers and projects to be worked and more effectively, showing students greatly improved critical thinking and learnability skills. The software is still used commonly to date, with the future of collaboration seeming ever more apparent with an increasingly digital and distant world. Google Docs can make up for the faults of face-to-face collaboration and improve features to make up for its own limitations, helping boost not just productivity and collaboration but creativity and stronger relationships with collaborators. This paper itself has been written utilizing the software, with fast synchronization to the cloud to save work and useful formatting features. Information technology makes its way into all of our lives, whether that be big or small. Software such as Google Docs is extremely important in the lives of many, and with this paper, it is evident that its impact and history remain relevant today in understanding its use in the present and what it could look like in the future.

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