

COMPARING MICROSOFT 365 AND GOOGLE WORKSPACE

By: John Federico and Jeffrey Schoenberger

The ongoing and escalating competition between Microsoft and Google for the centerpiece of our work computing life benefits consumers with lower prices and additional features. For a barebones review of features, you can look to the respective pricing plans for [Microsoft](#) and [Google](#). In addition to the high-profile features, like Microsoft Word or Gmail, both services have added tons of “under the radar” tools worth knowing about. Below, we examine key areas of comparison between these two gorillas fighting over your firm’s business.

EMAIL

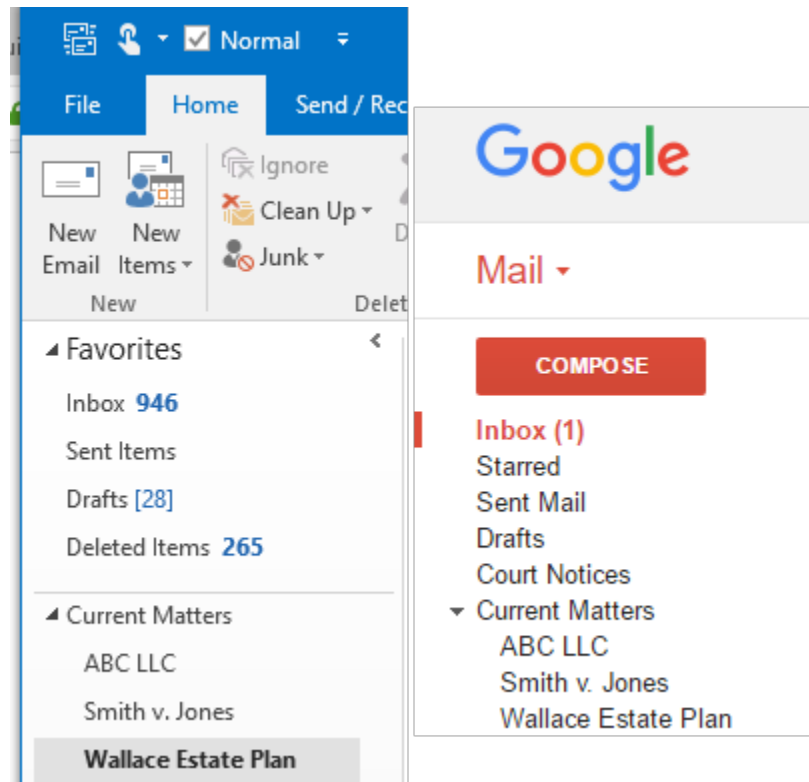
GMAIL VERSUS MICROSOFT 365 (EXCHANGE AND OUTLOOK)

Gmail and Microsoft 365 have similar email features. All basic functionality is present in both systems: email addressing with To, CC, BCC; automatic signatures (although Outlook has support for multiple signatures); formatting; attachments; attachment reminders; image support; email address auto-complete; out-of-office messages, conversation views, the ability to convert an email into an appointment, and mobile access. The main differences lay in feature implementation.

EMAILING ORGANIZATION PREFERENCES

Outlook uses standard folders to organize emails. Outlook contains a folder tree that includes both folders and subfolders. Many legal professionals create folders and subfolders for matters and then file emails into the appropriate folder. When an email is moved to a folder, it is actually stored in that folder.

In contrast to Outlook, Gmail stores all email in the same container. Gmail relies on labels instead of folders to organize email. Assigning a label to an email is analogous to filing an email into a folder. Gmail displays a list of all labels in a tree structure - similar to folders in Outlook. When you click a label, Gmail runs a search and just shows the email that has been tagged with that label. This action provides the same functionality as folders; it just works differently. From a functional standpoint, most users won’t notice the difference.



An advantage of Gmail's Labels over folders is that a single email message can be tagged with multiple labels. For example, all emails from a court could be labeled as "Court Notices" and with a label for each notice's specific case. You could instantly see all the notices from a given court with one label and look at case-specific emails as well. The same email can appear simultaneously under both labels.

SEE EMAIL WHEN AWAY FROM THE INTERNET (OFFLINE ACCESS)

Both Gmail and Microsoft 365 support offline access. Gmail provides offline access through a Chrome browser add-in and Microsoft 365 through Outlook. Both systems enable the user to create and reply to emails while disconnected from the Internet. When you reconnect to the Internet, the system synchronizes with the email server, sending mail you drafted while offline and receiving new emails.

Gmail's offline app provides access to email from the past 7, 30, or 90 days. Outlook offers offline access to emails from the past month, three months, six months, 12 months, or all emails. For road warriors, the amount of email stored offline might make a difference as a 90 day offline archive of email might not be enough for every user.

USER INTERFACE

Outlook is a desktop application with a history dating back to 1997. It simply has more features than Gmail's web interface. Both programs can be configured to provide a list of emails or a list of emails plus a preview pane. Outlook's features include Quick Steps (macros for emails) and Quick Parts to add boilerplate text to emails quickly. Gmail does not have these types of features, but some can be added with an add-in. Gmail has an extensive email filtering system that can auto-file emails upon receipt.

A minor difference is that Gmail can display a maximum of 100 emails at a time. You must navigate to the next page to see additional emails. Outlook can display hundreds or thousands of emails in a scrollable list. Users with large inboxes, or who receive over a hundred emails per day, may prefer Outlook's interface to Gmail.

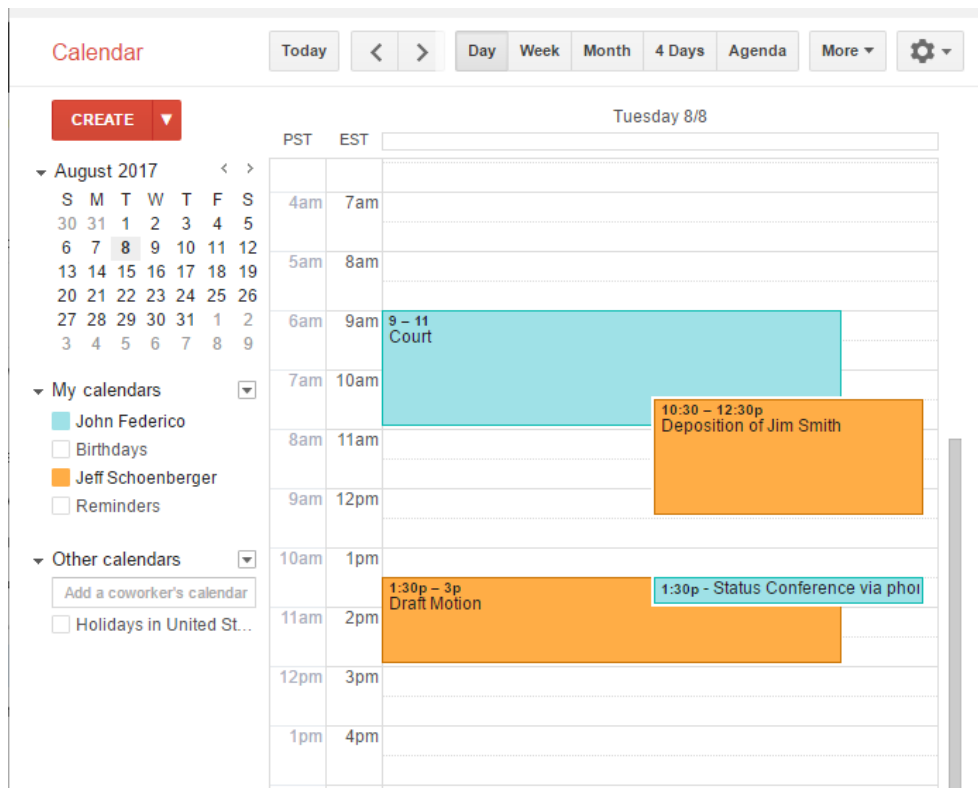
Both Gmail and Microsoft 365 have alternative interfaces for email. Microsoft 365 has a web interface that closely mirrors the Outlook interface but with fewer features. Gmail can be used with any IMAP-capable desktop email program, and can even be used with Outlook.¹

CALENDAR

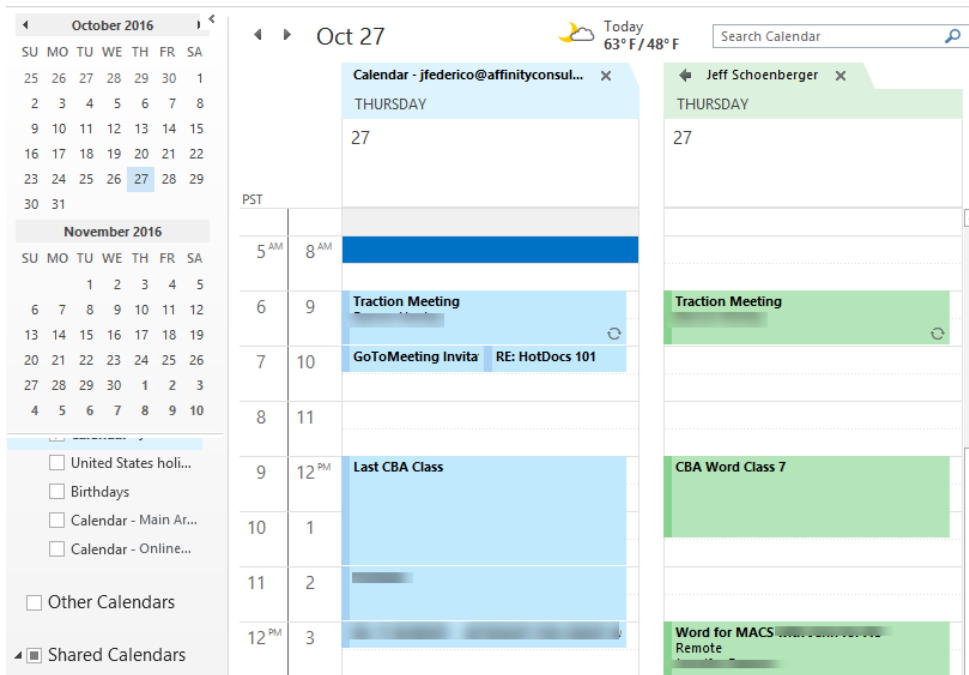
Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 support similar calendar features. Both can create basic appointments, all-day appointments, recurring appointments, and meeting invitations. Both support adding attachments to appointments, multiple time zones, scheduling tools to find available free times among meeting attendees, resource (e.g., meeting room) calendars, and shared calendars. Both can send and accept meeting invitations from the other.

CALENDARING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GOOGLE WORKSPACE AND MICROSOFT 365

The Google Workspace calendar displays multiple (shared) calendars by combining all the appointments on the same calendar, each calendar represented by a unique color. The Outlook desktop and Outlook web app can display either a combined, overlapping calendar or separate calendars side-by-side. This minor difference may affect staffers who support multiple attorneys. For example, if multiple attorneys share the same assistant, and the assistant is responsible for scheduling on multiple calendars, it may be necessary to have the side-by-side view instead of a combined view to minimize scheduling errors (scheduling on the wrong calendar).



¹ See [https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/add-a-gmail-account-to-outlook-70191667-9c52-4581-990e-e30318c2c081#PickTab=Outlook for Windows](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/add-a-gmail-account-to-outlook-70191667-9c52-4581-990e-e30318c2c081#PickTab=Outlook%20for%20Windows).



APPLICATIONS

Google Workspace's office applications include Docs (Word Processing), Sheets (Spreadsheets), and Slides (presentations). None of these applications are as full-featured as the standard Microsoft Office desktop applications you get with nearly all Microsoft 365 subscriptions. While Workspace's applications work well for basic documents, they may fall short for documents that require complex formatting or features. In addition, while they can import Microsoft Office documents, the import process typically destroys complex formatting in the original document. *The Workspace applications and Microsoft Office applications are not directly compatible.*

GOOGLE DOCS VERSUS MS WORD

Docs meets most basic word processing needs, but may be too basic for drafting complex legal documents.

ONLY NINE STYLES IN DOCS

Google Docs has only nine built-in styles: Normal Text, Title, Subtitle, and Headings 1 through 6. Their names cannot be changed. Likewise, you cannot add additional styles, although you can change the formatting of the provided styles.

Using styles is among the fastest and most reliable ways to format a complex document. Complex documents often require more than nine styles. For example, consider an operating agreement with recitals (with numbering), four levels of numbering in the agreement, four corresponding text levels, and an Exhibit with two levels of numbering. The resulting style sheet might look like this:

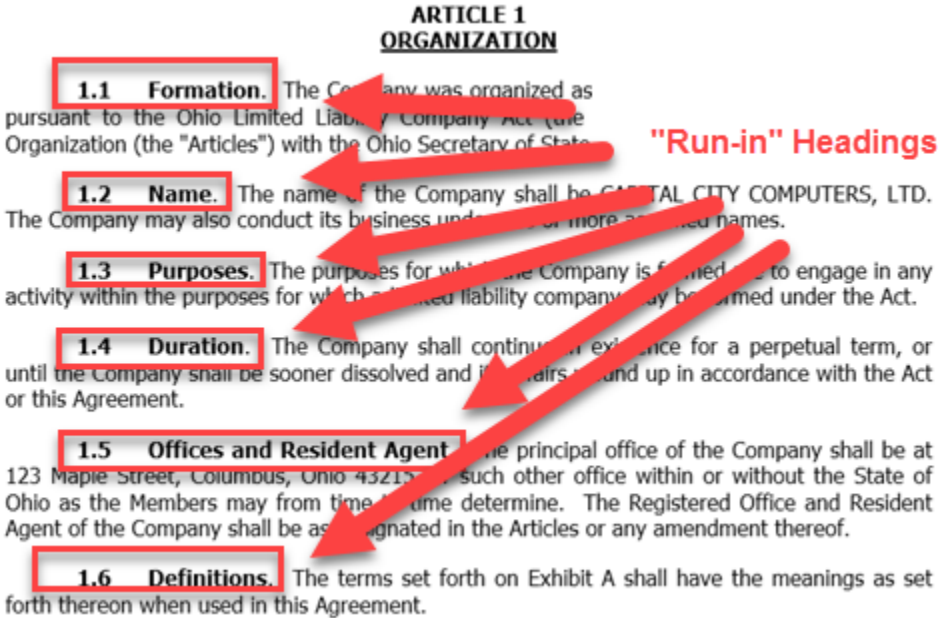
TITLE	
1.	Recital
	Article I Heading 1
	Text 1
1.1	Heading 2

	Text 2
1.1.1	Heading 3
	Text 3
1.1.1.1	Heading 4
	Text 4
	Exhibit Title
1.	Exhibit Number 1
a.	Exhibit Number 2

A style set this extensive (13 styles) would be impossible to duplicate in Google Docs. It lacks the feature set to support this level of formatting. Word easily supports creating this type of style set.

TABLES OF CONTENTS WITH INLINE HEADINGS

Google Docs can create a basic table of contents based on its built-in heading styles. However, it cannot automatically generate a table of contents with run-in headings. A run-in heading is a heading that is part of the paragraph text.



Attempting to generate a table of contents for this text in Google Docs will result in entire paragraphs appearing in the table of contents. There is no feature in Google Docs that will separate the paragraph headings to create a table of contents (this feature exists in MS Word).

Table of Contents

ARTICLE 1	
ORGANIZATION	2
1.1 Formation. The Company was organized as an Ohio Limited Liability Company pursuant to the Ohio Limited Liability Company Act (the "Act") by the filing of Articles of Organization (the "Articles") with the Ohio Secretary of State on February 19, 2000.	2
1.2 Name. The name of the Company shall be CAPITAL CITY COMPUTERS, LTD. The Company may also conduct its business under one or more assumed names.	2
1.3 Purposes. The purposes for which the Company is formed are to engage in any activity within the purposes for which a limited liability company may be formed under the Act.	2
1.4 Duration. The Company shall continue in existence for a perpetual term, or until the Company shall be sooner dissolved and its affairs wound up in accordance with the Act or this Agreement.	2
1.5 Offices and Resident Agent. The principal office of the Company shall be at 123 Maple Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215, or such other office within or without the State of Ohio as the Members may from time to time determine. The Registered Office and Resident Agent of the Company shall be as designated in the Articles or any amendment thereof.	3
1.6 Definitions. The terms set forth on Exhibit A shall have the meanings as set forth thereon when used in this Agreement.	3

TABLES OF AUTHORITY

For legal professionals who draft pleadings or other citation-heavy words, creating a table of authorities is often one of the final, yet most time-consuming and tedious parts of the authoring process. One must read through the work and find all case, statutory, and other types of citations, and then correctly catalog them to create a table of authorities. Fortunately, some word processors possess this feature built-in, and others work with compatible third-party citation programs.

Google Docs does not contain a table of authorities feature. However, Word has a table of authorities features for automatically generating a table of authorities for briefs.

AUTOMATICALLY-UPDATING CROSS-REFERENCES

Google Docs does not contain a cross-references feature. Documents that require automatic cross-references cannot be drafted in Google Docs unless you utilize an add-on like [Smart References](#), which are maintained by third-party developers and provide less control than a native feature. Word has extensive support for automatic cross-references.

OTHER USEFUL FEATURES ABSENT IN DOCS

There are several other feature disparities between Google Docs and Microsoft Word. For example, a popular feature is "Keep with Next," used to keep one paragraph attached to the next paragraph and prevent a page break in-between. In the context of legal, this feature is handy for signature blocks on pleadings or other places where an "interrupting page break" is undesirable, such as headings being orphaned from their relevant text. Unfortunately, Google Docs does not have this feature.

SHARING DOCUMENTS BETWEEN GOOGLE DOCS AND MS WORD

Sharing simply-formatted documents between Google Docs and Microsoft Word is possible. However, converting and opening a complex Microsoft Word document in Google Docs fairs poorly. Since Google Docs lacks many advanced formatting features from Word, converting the document will eliminate or break the formatting upon conversion.

Fortunately, if you import a Word document into Google Docs, Google Docs imports the document and saves it as a separate file, leaving the original Word document untouched. Thus, your properly-formatted Word document still exists as a Word document in its original condition.

COAUTHORING: WHERE GOOGLE DOCS PERFORMS BEST

Google Docs possesses excellent coauthoring capabilities. A Docs document can be simultaneously opened and edited by multiple users in real-time with near-zero lag between one participant typing and his coauthors seeing the results. Microsoft added a similar feature to Word. However, many people feel that Google Docs coauthoring feature is superior.

GOOGLE SHEETS VERSUS MS EXCEL

While MS Excel is beloved by hardcore spreadsheet nerds, Sheets is an eminently capable spreadsheet program that is likely more than sufficient for most “normal” spreadsheet work. Although Excel outpowers Sheets in sheer number of features, unsurprisingly having begun life two decades before Sheets, Google’s offering has several nice features.

COAUTHORING WINS AGAIN

As with Docs, Google’s Sheets program excels (pun intended!) at collaborative work over the Internet. Like Docs, multiple people can work in the Sheets file simultaneously without hindering each other, slowing down the experience, or risking file corruption.

VERSION CONTROL

Sheets contains built-in version control. Sheets keeps a revision history of every spreadsheet. This capability makes it easy to jump back to a prior version and see who made a particular change.

CLOUD-BASED DOCUMENT STORAGE

Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 each offer their own cloud storage solution. Google’s product is called Google Drive, and Microsoft’s is OneDrive. Both products work similarly to Dropbox and other file-sharing applications. You can access either product through a web browser, computer desktop app (Windows or Mac), and mobile apps.

SELECTIVE SYNC

Selective synchronization is an important setting available on Google Drive and OneDrive’s desktop applications. By default, the products show “placeholders” for your files within its sync folder. The actual file represented is not downloaded to your device until you double-click on it. This approach is terrific for saving space on the local device but becomes problematic when you lack Internet access, such as on a plane. If you know in advance that you will be without Internet, you can select folders or documents to be pre-downloaded to your device to use the file offline. Then, when you reconnect to the Internet, your changes sync up. You may realize both performance and storage gains if you only synchronize the folders you need.

GOOGLE-SPECIFIC FEATURE

UPLOADS

One setting to be aware of is the “Convert uploads” setting. This setting will automatically convert Word documents uploaded to Google Drive through a web browser to Google Docs format.

Convert uploads

Convert uploaded files to Google Docs editor format

You will want to uncheck this. If left checked, a Word document uploaded to Drive will automatically convert to Google Docs and lose all Word-specific features. Unlike the import feature, “Convert uploads” will not create a copy of the Word document. Instead, uploading the Word document will convert it to Docs, and you will only be left with a Docs document- and a potential formatting disaster.

COMPANY-WIDE FILE SHARE

By default, files uploaded to Google Drive are only available to the single uploading user. Google Drive initially works like a web-based “My Documents” folder. Google recommends setting up a shared folder for a company-wide file

share. (See <https://support.google.com/a/users/answer/9310249>.) This action creates a company-wide folder in Google Docs. The folder will also sync to your local computer with Google Drive.

INTEGRATIONS

When deciding between Google Workspace and Microsoft 365, consider what other applications or systems you need to integrate and how well they are supported. For example, you may have a desktop application-based practice management system and would like to turn on email integration. Before making a change to either Google Workspace or Microsoft 365, check whether they are compatible. Typically, desktop-based software has better integration with Exchange (via Microsoft 365), but may access Gmail with an IMAP connection. Web-based software may have better integrations with Gmail (Google Workspace).

You don't want to pay for something expecting it to be compatible only to find out, after the fact, that your systems cannot talk to each other. Check the specifications!

SECURITY

REGULATORY OR DATA COMPLIANCE

Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 possess similar security and compliance features.

Google Workspace² has SOC1, (SSAE-16/ISAE-3402), SOC2, SOC3, ISO27001, ISO 27018:2014, and FedRAMP, among many others. HIPAA compliance requires a separate agreement.³ Google lists its full compliance offerings here: <https://cloud.google.com/security/compliance/offerings>.

Microsoft 365 has SOC1, (SSAE-18/ISAE-3402), SOC2 (AT Section 101), SOC3, ISO27001, ISO 27018:2014, and FedRAMP, among many others. HIPAA compliance requires a separate agreement.⁴ Microsoft lists its full compliance offerings here: <https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/compliance/regulatory/offering-home?view=o365-worldwide>.

PRIVACY

Both Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 have extensive privacy policies designed to protect your data. With either system, you own your data, and the companies do not scan or use your data for any purpose other than providing service to you. NOTE: The same is not true for cloud services that are "free," such as the "free" Gmail account. The reason services are "free" is because they make money selling your information to advertisers and other services. Therefore, you should never use a "free" service in a professional environment.

TWO-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION

Both support two-factor authentication, which requires a username, password, and a code supplied via phone. Two-factor (or multi-factor) authentication is vital to turn on and can prevent a cyber-attacker from just guessing your password or prevent a disgruntled employee who may have your username and password from accessing your account.

With two-factor authentication enabled, every time you log in from an unregistered device (or every login, if you prefer), the system prompts you for your username, password, and a random code. The code is either generated by a special app (like [Authy](#), [Google Authenticator](#), or [Microsoft Authenticator](#)), texted to your phone, or provided via an automated phone call. So even if your username and password are compromised, the "bad guys" can still not access your account without that code.

² See <https://workspace.google.com/faq/>.

³ See <https://support.google.com/a/answer/3407054#zippy=%2Chow-can-i-receive-a-copy-of-my-electronically-accepted-hipaa-baa>.

⁴ See <https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/compliance/regulatory/offering-hipaa-hitech>.

SUSPENDING AN ACCOUNT

Both Google Workspace⁵ and Microsoft 365⁶ have procedures for suspending an account when an employee leaves your firm. You just don't want to delete that user's account, as it will (after a hold period) delete all their data as well. These steps involve (1) blocking or suspending access, (2) copying user data (files, emails, etc.), and then (3) deleting the account.

MOBILE DEVICES

Both Google Workspace⁷ and Microsoft 365⁸ support mobile device management (MDM). However, MDM is not activated by default - it must be turned on and configured in either system. Once activated and properly configured, mobile device management provides control over users' mobile phones and tablets. Features include:

- Require device management controls (screen lock, encryption)
- Remote Wipe (erases data on lost or stolen devices)
- Restrict file access
- Restrict applications

MDM is an easy configuration to overlook, but vital if you access your firm data over a smartphone or tablet. For example, suppose your tablet or smartphone is unsecured, and your device is lost or stolen. In that case, the new "owner" could have unrestricted access to all of your firm data, including client-confidential information.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Legal ethics and professional responsibility rules may require you to understand and implement additional security measures that are not turned on by default in either Google Workspace or Microsoft 365, most notably Two (or Multi) Factor Authorization and Mobile Device Management.

When you use a cloud-based system, you are putting your information on someone else's computer that can be publicly accessed anywhere in the world. When you add your smartphone, your iPad, your assistant's phone, another tablet used in trial, or any other device into the mix, you create potential security holes. If the device isn't secured, you expose the firm and client to enormous security risks if the device is lost or stolen. You need to lessen these risks by using the additional security features in Google Workspace and Microsoft 365. Learn about and use them.

CONCLUSION

Both Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 are eminently capable of handling a firm's email and calendaring needs. Both offer comparable document storage solutions, though neither alone rises to a complete "document management system," with its added search, versioning, and storage features. Naturally, the products have different interfaces: Google is browser-based, whereas Microsoft has a long history of desktop applications. Try both to see which interface works best for you.

There are a couple of areas, notably in the Applications section above, where Microsoft's tradition of desktop apps, such as Word, really plays to its strengths. But, of course, some of that is merely the difference between the desktop and the browser; Word Online is nearly as feature-light as Google Docs, and both pale next to desktop Word.

Fortunately, all the plans are structured in such a way that you can mix and match. For example, you could use Google Workspace for email and calendar and subscribe to the Microsoft 365 Apps plan, which contains all essential

⁵ See <https://support.google.com/a/answer/33312>.

⁶ See <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Remove-a-former-employee-from-Office-365-44d96212-4d90-4027-9aa9-a95eddb367d1>.

⁷ See <https://support.google.com/a/answer/1734200>.

⁸ See <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Capabilities-of-built-in-Mobile-Device-Management-for-Office-365-a1da44e5-7475-4992-be91-9ccec25905b0>.

Office applications (Word, Excel, PowerPoint). Make sure the solution you choose fits into your workflow, integrates with your other existing applications, and works the way you expect.