

Cloud-based Project Management Software

In 2011 we talked a lot about Cloud-based systems using SaaS. In 2012 we will be expanding our discussions, addressing issues/concerns and getting into more specifics. As an EDI Project Manager, I am rising to the issue of Cloud-based Project Management Software.

With the advent of web-based applications such as Zoho, Tracker, ACEProject, HappyTODOs, plus Google Docs, Sales Force, plus even GOTOMEETING and DropBox; there are a lot of new possibilities. I am not endorsing anybody, but considering these to replace desktop tools such as MS Project, Outlook and Excel. I want to be in the forefront as more and more companies replace the desktop software they are using and turn towards on-line – or “cloud-based” project management software solutions. Web based project management tools have several significant advantages over desktop software that make them cheaper, faster, and easier to upgrade. No installation or updates!

As the tool is web-based, there is no need to install any software, meaning that low-horsepower PCs can use the tool. All that is required is an on-line connection and a browser. Not only that, but when the tools are upgraded, and new features released, there's no cumbersome process, or disks and drivers that need to be updated – just log on to your tool, and the latest version is there for you to use! It's easier to manage outsourced teams.

As companies outsource more time-consuming parts of projects – managing them has now become a challenge. Different time zones, software, and business processes mean keeping the project up to date gets harder. Using desktop software opens up possibilities of delays to the project. With web based project and time management software, everything is easier. The whole team sees the same version, the project manager can update everyone simultaneously, and team members know right away what their role is, regardless of their time zone or geographical location.

With desktop tools, there is hardware maintenance, software upgrading AND backing up your database. With cloud-based project management tools everything is backed up on the cloud on remote servers. In case of an emergency, all the data is restored quickly, so all your team and projects remain on track.

What is interesting is that you do not have to rely on just one software package. For example, if you do not like the file storage/security on your project and time management software, you could use Google DOCS or DropBox. If you liked everything about one of the packages, but did not have strong collaborative powers, bring in GoToMEETING.

To start evaluating products, I ranked (from my opinion) the possible attributes from most important to least important. Don't forget, you don't get all these in MS Project either (example: you depend on MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint).

- (1) Collaboration
- (2) Data Management
- (3) Resource Management
- (4) Documents, Spreadsheets and Reporting
- (5) Time and Expense Reporting

- (6) Management Presentations
- (7) Asset Management
- (8) Help Desk
- (9) Invoicing

All the applications we looked at are examples of software as a service (SaaS) or cloud computing applications, whereby software utilities are hosted on remote servers rather than on personal computers. Some of the Project Management Software (and other tools that a project manager needs) are identified here:

Tracker (TrackerSuite.Net)

Flexible, Web Based Project Management Software

TrackerSuite.Net is a suite of integrated Web applications that simplifies project management, tasks, job costing, budgeting and more. TrackerSuite.Net is a suite of integrated, modular applications for Web based project management, help desk, time and expense reporting, purchasing, check request automation, invoicing, asset management, resource management and reporting. TrackerSuite.Net Web applications are accessed via Microsoft Internet Explorer, or through Firefox. TrackerSuite.Net can integrate with other project management software applications including Microsoft Project, most popular CRM applications and virtually any other Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) compatible enterprise platform.

ACEProject

You may use the mobile version of AceProject on an iPhone, an Android smartphone or a Blackberry, it's up to you. AceProject is also compatible with tablets such as the iPad and Android-powered devices. Both the regular and the mobile version work well on tablets.

Zoho

Offers a suite of on-line web applications geared towards increasing your productivity and offering easy collaboration. The Zoho Office Suite is a Web-based on-line office suite containing word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, databases, note-taking, wikis, customer relationship management (CRM), project management, invoicing and other applications.

HappyTODOs

Completely free, with no limitations. You can manage as many projects as you like, and with as many members as you need to add. It is a "light" system, but remember, "there is no free lunch"; but a good choice for small projects.

Google Docs

When you create a Google Account, you automatically get access to web-based office apps, email, calendar, file storage, tasks list and instant messaging but one piece that's still missing from the Google cloud is "project management." Even Google Apps, a service that is so popular among businesses, doesn't have any project management related features to help teams plan and coordinate better. Some people use spreadsheets in Google Docs and Gmail for co-ordinating tasks but it leaves a lot to be desired. If you are a Gmail or Google Apps user and are looking for an on-line project management app that can integrate with your other Google services (mainly Google Docs and Google Calendar), there are several in the Google Apps Marketplace.

Sales Force

Had some great success with them a couple of years ago. They don't bill themselves as project management software, but they have a lot of great tools.

GOTOMEETING

These folks are the “cat's meow” when it comes to collaboration. No more of this stuff like “did you get the file I emailed you,” I just bring it up on the screen!

Dropbox

I like it for moving files amongst team members. I like their security too.

Keywords: Project Management; Cloud; SaaS; EDI; Zoho; Tracker; ACEProject; HappyTODOs; Google Docs; Sales Force; GOTOMEETING; DropBox

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