The brave new world of online software

A quick glance at today's computer news reveals the online programs that Google, Microsoft and Adobe are making available. These Web-based applications seem to be a real trend for the future of many smaller programs.

Working with these programs will require a good broadband connection. Since more of us now have these connections, let's look at new Web-based application products from a newspaper point of view.

The first Web-based application I heard of was Google Documents and Spreadsheets. Essentially, it's a place on the Web where you can type and save word processing documents.

But would a newspaper ever really use such Web-based programs? If so, how could these programs benefit us?

Well, Google Documents is a free (yes, I did say free) Web-based word-processing and spreadsheet program that keeps documents current. It also lets people you choose update the files from their own computers. This could be an advantage to newspapers by letting you coordinate reporter assignments outside the office and access them anywhere without e-mailing the document back and forth. You can also let someone log on and input their stories.

The online word processor saves in many different formats, such as Microsoft Word, Open Office, RTF, HTML or text documents. Additional features include spellcheck, an upload document capability and the ability to e-mail directly from the online program.

And if you don't already own a program like Microsoft Word, don't worry. Google Docs opens Word formatted files even if you don't own Word. This way, you can always open and use Word files.

Google Doc's save feature is especially nice. This lets you save documents (even PDFs) to your desktop. It also keeps a history of your saves in the event that you need to retrieve an older version of the file.

Because this application is Web-based, you can easily share your documents by e-mailing them as attachments. You can also invite others via e-mail to edit or view your documents.

A real-time chat feature is included, which allows you communicate with a reporter as you edit a document.

Google Doc's text editor is a simple

computernotes
from the road

by WILMA MELOT

WYSIWYG editor that is similar to the first versions of Word or the editor in many current e-mail programs.

Google Spreadsheets work with .xls, .csv and .ods formatted data. It includes export capability for PDF and HTML.

With Google Spreadsheet's formatting and formula editing, you can also manipulate spreadsheets and calculate results to make your data look the way you want it.

The maximum size of file that Google Docs

But you may be asking how Google saves your documents. Google Docs & Spreadsheets save to a secure, online storage facility, allowing access to your documents and spreadsheets from anywhere. That way, if your hard drive crashes at work or home, you won't lose your saved content online.

Of course, I recommend using caution when including sensitive personal information in documents you share, such as Social Security numbers, financial account information, addresses or phone numbers.

Files can be permanently deleted but because of the way Google maintains this service, residual copies of your files and other information associated may remain on the servers for three weeks.

Also, make sure not to give your files to live chat rooms unless you know who is going to view the information. No one can view your files without your invitation.

If this looks appealing to you, check it out at http://docs.google.com/

For alternatives to Google, look at some of the other big dogs that are creating "online software."

and Spreadsheets can save is 500k per document and 2MB per embedded image.

Spreadsheets can be saved up to 10,000 rows, 256 columns, 50,000 cells or 20 sheets — whichever of the four limits is reached first.

Users have a maximum of 200 spreadsheets to save. A maximum of 20 spreadsheets can be open at once.

Google Docs and Spreadsheets works well with these Web browsers:

Internet Explorer (IE) 6.0+ for Windows (except IE 6.0.26); Firefox 1.07, 1.5.0.6+ (Mac and Windows — except for 1.0.8 on Windows and Mac) and 1.5b1 on Mac, and Netscape 7.2, 8.0.

When working in Google Docs, make sure to enable cookies and JavaScript.

Being a Web-based application, Google Docs allows you to create and save documents and spreadsheets without taking up space on your local hard drive. However, you do have the option to save a copy to your hard drive at any time.

Online software is a new term to the computer world. It loosely means a desktop program that integrates with online services while you work. Both Corel and Adobe are creating smaller versions of their programs to work this way. There will soon be a smaller version of Photoshop that works online in a limited way. Also, Corel plans to formally unveil a public beta of its WordPerfect Lightning productivity suite soon. The WordPerfect Lightning beta is designed to work in an online environment while remaining on the desktop.

WordPerfect Lightning aims to offer a tightly integrated productivity platform comprised of both online and offline components.

Remix and the coming hosted Photoshop are part of a larger move toward integrating hosted services by Adobe.

The online software version of Photoshop should be released in the next few months.

Answers to a few popular questions from my journeys on the road

In my line of work, I receive questions all the time. Leah Simmons, a hard-working editor at The Ardmoreite, first asked me a question that I've since received several times.
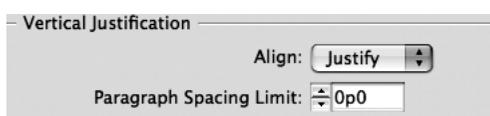
"How do you fit a column's copy to make the copy square off with a margin in InDesign?" Simmons asks.

Well, Leah, simply click somewhere in the copy in the last column and click on 'text frame options,' which is under the 'Object' menu. Then look for 'align' under 'vertical

justification' in the dialog box. Switch alignment to 'justify.' Use 'Paragraph Spacing Limit' to line type up across the bottom and top of the text block.

Another popular question is why does my OSX Mac crash. Here's one way to fix your Mac, if you know what program is causing the crash.

First, go to the user icon on the left side of your finder window. It should look like a small house and have your user name on it. Within that folder is a folder called 'Library' and

within that is a 'Preferences' folder. Look for the name of your problem program there. For example, if you're crashing in InDesign, locate the Preference file for that program and throw it away. It's usually OK to throw away the files within this folder. Don't forget to restart your computer after this. If you know you're having trouble with just one component, throw only that preference away.

It's always a good idea to verify Disk Permissions and Repair Disk Permissions with Disk Utility. It's located in the OSX applications folder in the utilities folder.

plugged IN

Tips for training manuals

With spring upon us, I was thinking of the yard work I need to do to get things growing again. That got me to thinking about growing useful tools for training new people in your office.

From my time spent at the state's newspapers, I've noticed that good company training manuals for new employees could really be of service. You could start it a little at a time, and build on it over the years. That way, navigating your computer system is a breeze to newcomers.

The manual should include a simple step-by-step process for the employee to get to the files they need to work with.

For example, your manual might say: "Click on the the Apple on your desktop dock and drag down to 'recent servers' and choose 'Server.' When the dialog box comes up, click the 'connect' button. Then look on your desktop for an Icon called 'server.' Double-click on this icon and choose the 'news' folder by double-clicking on it. Within this folder, find today's dated folder and open it by double-clicking on it. From that point, choose from the files you want to work on."

If the new employee is just going to be writing stories, include the steps for navigating to this folder from within the 'save as dialog' box.

Also include steps for printing and how to change printers, if you have more than one.

You may want to include screen shots of the print dialog boxes with the right settings. The command to take screen shots on a Mac is Apple+Shift+4. After the keyboard command, drag the cursor over the area you wish to photograph. This makes a picture file on your desktop that you can print or place in your manual. On Windows XP, press the 'Print Screen' key on your keyboard and the entire screen will be copied to your clipboard. Go to Photoshop or your layout program, paste the file, then crop it and print it.

Computer information that you can never remember is good to include in your manual. Chances are that if you had trouble remembering it, so will others.

You also might want to print information from the 'help' directory in InDesign. InDesign has an icon that lets you print just the right pane with the instructions to PDF. To access on the Web, right-click on the page (on a Mac, control-click) and choose 'save page as.' Many Web pages have a 'print this page' button, so watch for that item. Of course, you can always click 'print' under the 'file' menu.