

Productivity, Part 2: Cloud Storage, Remote Meeting Tools, Screencasting, Speech Recognition Software, Password Managers, and Online Data Backup

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It is an opportune time for radiologists to focus on personal productivity. The ever increasing reliance on computers and the Internet has significantly changed the way we work. Myriad software applications are available to help us improve our personal efficiency. In this article, the authors discuss some tools that help improve collaboration and personal productivity, maximize e-learning, and protect valuable digital data.

Key Words: Productivity, cloud applications, collaboration

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Performance expectations are at an all-time high for radiologists and are predicted to continue to rise in the future, making it an opportune time to focus on personal productivity. Productivity is not only about getting tasks completed on time but is also about simplifying one's life and removing unwanted distractions so that important tasks may be completed in a timely manner [1,2]. Ever increasing reliance on computers and the Internet has significantly influenced the way we work, but not optimizing their use can lead to distraction and wasted time. Myriad software applications have been developed to boost personal efficiency. In this article, we discuss some tools that help improve collaboration and personal productivity, maximize e-learning, and protect valuable digital data.

CLOUD APPLICATIONS

Utility

Loss of data often translates into great losses of time, money, and effort and is a common problem when users

rely on devices such as external drives or multimedia CD/DVD-ROMs for personal storage. Theft, fire, accidental deletion, and hardware failure can all contribute to lost files. The fallibility of personal data storage tools was addressed by the development of cloud applications. In simple terms, the "cloud" refers to a model of networked personal or enterprise storage whereby data are stored not only in users' computers but also in virtualized pools of storage, which are generally hosted by third parties.

The utility of cloud apps goes far beyond their capabilities as remote backup and file retrieval tools. To understand how that is accomplished, it is important to understand the distinction between cloud storage and cloud sharing. "Cloud storage" refers to storing a computer's files and folders, or in some cases the entire hard drive content, for future access. "Cloud sharing" refers to storing selected files from a computer on the Internet so that they can be shared with others. This is accomplished by having a folder on a user's computer; only the contents of that folder are shared and synchronized on the cloud server.

The ability to share the contents of a folder on a user's computer and synchronize files makes cloud apps important productivity tools. In the past, collaboration would have to be completed face to face or via e-mail. This was highly inefficient, resulting in delay and duplication of work. There are also limitations to the amount of data that can be transmitted via e-mail. Cloud sharing allows the collaboration of several users spread all over the globe, working together simultaneously on a particular task, while using different devices (Fig. 1). A potential use of cloud sharing in academic radiology is the creation of a universally accessible and safe repository of educational materials. An online cloud-based library of lectures, video files, presentations,

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Dr Moshiri owns stock in Apple Corporation and Amazon.com, Inc (Seattle, Washington). Drs Pandey and Bhargava own stock in Apple Corporation (Cupertino, California).

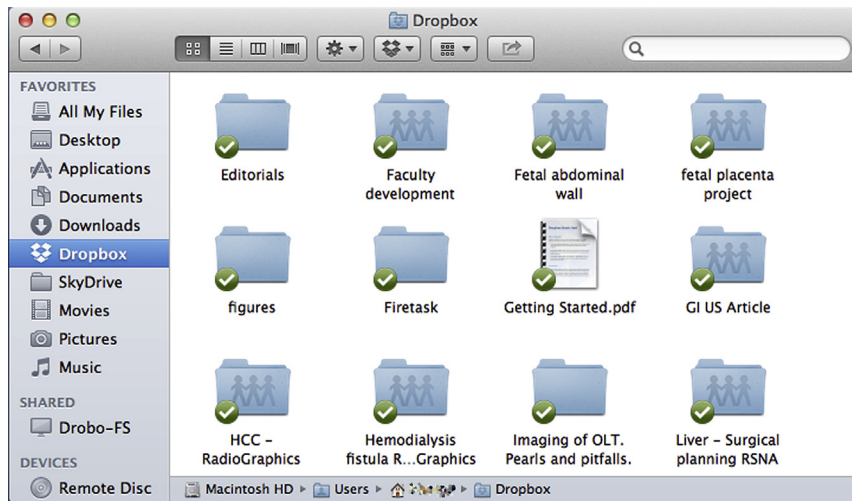


Fig 1. Screenshot from Dropbox shows how multiple research project documents can be shared with other users' to enhance collaboration.

articles, test-taking modules, and so on, can be created, catalogued, easily updated, and synchronized to be accessed not only by a host of computers but also from the convenience of a tablet computer or smart phone [3]. Some important features of various cloud apps are summarized in Table 1 [4-7].

Impression

Cloud apps have dramatically changed the way data are transmitted and stored and have opened new opportunities for collaboration, thus increasing productivity.

Cloud sharing increases efficiency by reducing the delays and duplication of work that are an inherent part of collaboration when only face-to-face, phone, or e-mail communication is used. The creation of a universally accessible and safe repository of educational materials is a unique use of cloud apps with tremendous potential to increase productivity in academic radiology [2].

A limitation of cloud apps is that they potentially pose new security risks. Critical information such as patient information and passwords should not be stored on a cloud server.

Table 1. Some of the most popular cloud applications

Application	Platform	Pricing/Plans	Maximum File Size	Backup Facility	Additional Features
Dropbox	Linux, Mac, Windows, Android, Blackberry, iOS (all)	Free up to 18 GB; Pro (100–500 GB, \$8.25–\$41.60/month); Business (1 TB for \$795/year for 5 users)	300 MB	Only pictures, music, and movies	Encrypted data storage, but no personal encryption; offers file versioning for 1 month
Box	All except Linux	Free up to 10 MB; Starter (100 GB, \$5/user/month); Business (1 TB, \$15/user/month); Unlimited (call for pricing)	250 MB (free); 2 GB (paid)	Media and data files on the drive	Encrypted data storage, but no personal encryption; offers file versioning
Google Drive	All except Linux	Free up to 15 GB; paid (\$4.99/100 GB/month)	10 GB	Data files on the drive	Real-time collaboration and simultaneous editing with Microsoft Office; encrypted data storage, but no personal encryption; offers unlimited file versioning for data files, 1 month for others
SugarSync	All except Linux	Free up to 5 GB; Personal (60–250 GB, \$7.49–\$24.99/month); Business (1 TB, \$55/month for 3 users); Unlimited (call for pricing)	100 MB (web); no limit (client application)	Complete system backup	Personal encryption facility; offers file versioning with up to 5 older versions of the file available
SkyDrive	All except Linux	Free up to 7 GB; paid (up to 100 GB, \$10/\$25/\$50 for extra 20/50/100 GB/year)	2 GB	Data files on the drive	Encrypted data storage, but no personal encryption; offers file versioning

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