**UNIT-IV**

**Cloud Services**

**Collaborating on Calendars, Schedules, and Task Management**

This section of the book takes a look at different types of personal and business computing tasks, and at the web-based applications that can facilitate those tasks. Think of this section as a giant catalog of the best of what cloud computing has to offer: Whatever type of application you’re looking for, chances are there’s something in the cloud that will do the job for you. We start our examination of these cloud services with applications that help you get organized—calendars, schedulers, planners, and task management tools. Whether you want to keep a simple group calendar or to-do list or need something

more powerful to schedule appointments and meetings, you’re sure to find some web-based application in this chapter to your liking.

**Exploring Online Calendar Applications**

Most computer users today have embraced keeping their schedules on their PCs. Not that the old-fashioned wall-hanging calendar is dead, it’s just that it’s a whole lot easier to track appointments and events electronically; the computer does all the busywork for you. The problem, however, with using calendar software (such as Microsoft Outlook or Windows Calendar) is that all your appointments have to reside on a single computer. If you keep a personal calendar on your home PC, you can’t reference it from work or when you’re traveling. That limits the calculator program’s usefulness. That’s why, instead of using a calendar that’s wedded to a single computer, many users are moving to web-based calendars. A web-based calendar service stores your calendars on the Internet, where they can be accessed from any

computer that has an Internet connection. This lets you check your schedule when you’re on the road, even if your assistant in the office or your spouse at home has added new appointments since you left. Web-based calendars are also extremely easy to share with other users in any location, which make

them great for collaborative projects. We’ll look at some of the most popular web-based calendars next. Although there are some pay calendars out there, I find the free ones just as functional— and easier for group members to access, since they don’t have to pay to use them. As to favorites, I admit to being a longtime user of Google Calendar; it does everything I need it to do. That said, Yahoo! Calendar does pretty much everything Google Calendar does, and should be another favorite, especially among non-business users. Then there’s Apple’s new MobileMe Calendar, which is already attracting a lot of attention; it should be considered by anyone also looking at the Google and Yahoo! applications.

**Google Calendar**

The most popular web-based calendar today, no doubt due to its association with the web’s most-used search engine, is Google Calendar (calendar.google.com). Google Calendar is free, full featured, and

easy to use. It lets you create both personal and shared calendars, which makes it ideal for tracking business group, family, and community schedules. As you can see in Figure 7.1, Google Calendar looks pretty much like every other calendar you’ve ever seen. You enter your appointments (which Google

calls “events”) directly into the calendar, which you can display in either daily, weekly, or monthly views. You can also, if you like, view your weekly agenda on a single page.



**FIGURE**

*The easy-to-use interface of Google Calendar. Note the multiple calendars listed in the My*

*Calendars box.*

Like all web-based calendars, all your events are stored in the cloud (in this case, the cloud created by Google’s own network of servers), not on your own computer. This means that you can access your calendar from any computer anywhere in the world. Just log in to the Google Calendar page and your calendar and all events are there. Because Google Calendar is web based, you can use it to create not only a private calendar for yourself, but also public calendars for your company or organization. Create a public calendar and all employees or attendees can access it via the web. In addition, special event invitation features make it easy to invite others to an event—public or private.

In addition, Google allows you to create several different—and different types of—calendars. You can create one calendar for home, another for work, and yet another for your son’s soccer team. Then you can view all your calendars from the same Google Calendar page, with the events from each calendar

color-coded for easy visibility. What types of calendars can you create with Google Calendar? Here’s the list:

\_ **Personal calendars**, like your default calendar

\_ **Public calendars**, which others can access via the web

\_ **Friends’ calendars**, which you import from their Google Calendar web pages

\_ **Holiday calendars**, which add national holidays to a basic calendar Setting up a new calendar is comically easy.

 In fact, there’s nothing to set up. When you first sign into the Google Calendar page, your calendar is already there, waiting for your input. There’s nothing to create, nothing to configure. Can it get any easier than that? And here’s something unique about Google Calendar. Because it’s part of the mighty Google empire, Google Calendar integrates smoothly with Google’s Gmail application. Google Calendar can scan your email messages for dates and times and, with a few clicks of your mouse, create events based on the

content of your Gmail messages. For all these reasons, I’m a big fan and longtime user of Google Calendar. I recommend it to any user for home or business use.

**Yahoo! Calendar**

One of Google Calendar’s primary competitors is Yahoo! Calendar (calendar.yahoo.com), hosted by its search competitor Yahoo! This web-based calendar looks, feels, and functions quite similarly to Google Calendar, and is also free for anyone to use. To be honest, most web-based calendars have a similar visual look. (How different can you make a calendar look, anyway?) One subtle difference in Yahoo! Calendar, however, is the presence of an Add Task button. This reflects Yahoo! Calendar’s offering of tasks in addition to events. You can still add individual items to your daily schedule, but you can also add longer-term tasks and have their due dates show up on your calendar. It’s a nice addition.

****

**FIGURE**

*The familiar look and feel of Yahoo! Calendar.*

Of course, you can share your Yahoo! calendars with other users, in a collaborative environment. Just click the Sharing link and indicate how you want to share—no sharing, view-only for friends, view-only for anyone, or view-only with special friends allowed to edit. Choose this last option for true collaboration.At present, Yahoo! Calendar only lets you create a single calendar. All your events, public and private, have to be stored on this calendar; you can’t create different calendars for different functions. (That’s one advantage that Google has over Yahoo! here.)

**Windows Live Calendar**

Because Google and Yahoo! both offer web-based calendars, it’s no surprise that the third-largest search site also has a competitive offering. Windows Live Calendar (mail.live.com/mail/calendar.aspx) is Microsoft’s web-based calendar, actually part of the Windows Live Hotmail email service. Windows Live Calendar looks a lot like both of its primary competitors. It offers tasks, like Yahoo! Calendar, and also lets you schedule meetings with other calendar and Hotmail users. (Figure 7.3 shows the page you use to send a meeting request.) Naturally, you can share your calendars with authorized users for group collaboration.



**FIGURE**

*Scheduling a group meeting with Windows Live Calendar.*

**Apple MobileMe Calendar**

Apple’s MobileMe (www.me.com) is a new competitor in the web-based apps market. It includes online mail, contacts, and calendar, as well as an online photo gallery and file storage. We’ll examine the other components of MobileMe in the appropriate chapters in this book; for now, let’s focus on

MobileMe’s calendar component. The MobileMe Calendar is, of course, a web-based calendar that can be

accessed from any computer connected to the Internet, Mac or Windows. What makes it more unique and potentially more useful is that it can also be accessed from Apple’s iPhone, which makes it a truly mobile calendar. As with competing calendars, you can display MobileMe in daily, weekly, or monthly

modes, MobileMe lets you create multiple calendars and display them all on the same screen, using different colors for each calendar. You can also synchronize your MobileMe calendars with Apple’s iCal and Microsoft Outlook calendars.

Even though MobileMe Calendar doesn’t offer much new or innovative (save for the iPhone interoperability, of course), it’s bound to be a strong competitor in the online apps market, especially for non-business users. That’s partly because of Apple’s cachet (everything Steve Jobs does is cool, for some folks), and partly because Apple does tend to get the details right. Let’s face it, MobileMe Calendar looks and feels a little slicker than all its competitors, Google Calendar included. It’s certainly worth a look—even if you’re already using another online calendar.



**FIGURE**

*One of the newest web-based calendars—Apple’s MobileMe Calendar.*

**AOL Calendar**

America Online isn’t quite the powerhouse that it used to be, but it still has millions of users, both paid subscribers and free web users. Any registered user can access AOL Calendar (calendar.aol.com), which integrates with the AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) service for both instant messaging and email. As with competing calendars, AOL Calendar lets you share calendars with authorized users; your calendars can be either private or public.

**CalendarHub**

Beyond Google, Yahoo!, Apple, and their ilk, many independent sites offer full-featured web-based calendars. Perhaps the most notable of these is CalendarHub (www.calendarhub.com), CalendarHub offers all the features found in the previously discussed webbased calendars—private/public calendars, sharing/collaboration, multiple calendars, task-based to-do lists, and the like. In addition, CalendarHub lets you publish calendars on your blog or website, which makes it great for creating sites for community groups, sports teams, and the like. Other users can sign up to receive email notification of new events, or subscribe to RSS feeds for any calendar view. And, of course, it’s completely free.



**FIGURE**

*CalendarHub—one of the most full-featured calendar applications on the web.*

**Hunt Calendars**

Hunt Calendars (www.huntcal.com) offers event-based web calendars. Useful features include email reminders, notification of event conflicts, notification of new and updated events, and the like. The site lets you add web links and images to calendar events, which is fairly unique. Also nice is the ability to customize the color scheme and graphics to reflect your organization’s look and feel. This

makes Hunt Calendars particularly attractive to businesses and community groups.



**FIGURE**

*A customized calendar for the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History, courtesy of Hunt*

*Calendars.*

**Famundo**

If you keep the schedule for a community group, check out Famundo (www.famundo.com). This site offers Famundo for Organizations, a free webbased calendar ideal for schools, churches, sports teams, and the like. After the public calendar has been created, users can subscribe to be notified of new and upcoming events. You can also add message boards, blogs, and other features to your calendar. The company also offers Famundo for Families, a personal version of their Organizations calendar. This version includes a family address book and messageboard, to facilitate family communication.



**FIGURE**

*A school calendar created with Famundo for Organizations.*

**eStudio Calendar**

eStudio Calendar (www.same-page.com/calendar-software.html) is designed specifically for business use. You get three types of calendars in a single interface:

\_ **Member Event** calendar helps users manage their personal time, keep track of meetings with others, and so on.

\_ **Team Event** calendar is used to schedule activities for a group, as well as schedule facilities.

\_ **Supervisor** calendar provides reports to managers about business activities and schedules.

In addition, you can use eStudio Calendar to broadcast information about group activities (via email) and to schedule meetings. Information about company events can also be automatically published to your website.

**30Boxes**

The name of 30Boxes (www.30boxes.com) refers to the 30 “boxes” displayed on a typical monthly calendar. The site itself offers a slick interface for adding events, as you can see in Figure 7.8. All your events can be shared with other designated users, plus you get to-do lists, a link to Google’s Gmail, and similar useful features.



**FIGURE**

*The easy-to-use interface for entering events into a 30Boxes calendar.*

**Trumba**

Trumba (www.trumba.com) offers web-based calendars ideal for community organizations, schools, and similar public entities. The company lets you embed individualized widgets (dubbed “spuds”), in your own website. These widgets let users view full calendars, add events to the schedule, receive email notification of events, and such.

**Calendars Net**

Calendars Net (www.calendars.net) is a free web-based calendar designed for companies or individuals who want to add interactive calendars to their websites. A typical calendar fits into a frame on your website, with little coding required. The site also hosts personal calendars in the cloud. You can employ four different levels of security (so that different users can view the calendar), add events, edit events, and even change universal calendar settings.

**Jotlet**

Here’s another way to add web-based calendar functionality to your website. Jotlet (www.jotlet.net) is a JavaScript API and library that you can use to build rich calendar functionality into any web page. If you’re skilled in HTML programming, this is a good way to build a calendar-based page. The Jotlet API

is free for noncommercial use, and also available (for a fee) for commercial sites.

**Exploring Online Scheduling Applications**

As anyone in a large office knows, scheduling a meeting can be a frustrating experience. Not only do you have to clear time from all the attendees’ individual schedules, you also have to make sure that the right-sized meeting room is available at the designated time. Experts claim that it takes seven emails or voice mails to arrange a single meeting; a typical businessperson can spend more than 100 hours each year just scheduling meetings. Enter, then, the online scheduling application. This web-based app takes much of the pain out of scheduling meetings, for both large and small groups. The typical app requires all users to enter their individual calendars beforehand. When you schedule a meeting, the app checks attendees’ schedules for the first available free time for all. The app then generates automated email messages to inform attendees of the meeting request (and the designated time), followed by automatic confirmation emails when attendees accept the invitation. Professionals who schedule appointments with their clients—doctors, lawyers, hairdressers, and the like—face similar scheduling challenges. For this purpose, separate web-based appointment scheduling applications exist. These apps function similarly to traditional meeting schedulers, but with a focus on customer appointments.

**Jiffle**

Let’s start by looking at web-based solutions for meeting scheduling. Our first app is Jiffle (www.jifflenow.com), which schedules meetings, appointments, and the like for the enterprise environment. To track employees’ free time, it synchronizes seamlessly with both Microsoft Outlook and Google Calendar. It also offers its own Jiffle Calendar application. Jiffle allows the originating user to mark available time slots on his calendar, and then share them with proposed attendees via a

Jiffle-generated email invitation.

 These attendees view the invitation, log in to the Jiffle website, and then select their preferred time slots from the ones proposed. Based on these responses, Jiffle picks the best time for the meeting and

notifies all attendees via an automatic confirmation email.



**FIGURE**

*Scheduling a meeting with Jiffle.*

For smaller companies, Jiffle is free for up to 10 meeting confirmations per month. For larger companies, Jiffle Plus, Jiffle Pro, and Jiffle Corporate plans are available.

**Presdo**

Unlike Jiffle, Presdo (www.presdo.com) is a scheduling tool that isn’t limited to a single company. Presdo lets you schedule meetings and events with anyone who has an email address. adding an event is as simple as entering a description into a box. You then enter the email addresses of other participants, and Presdo emails out the appropriate invites. When an attendee responds, he’s automatically added to the event’s guest list. (And, for the convenience of all guests, it’s a one-button process to add an event to a user’s Microsoft Outlook, Google Calendar, Yahoo! Calendar, or Apple iCal calendar.)

**Diarised**

Diarised (www.diarised.com) is, like Presdo, a web-based meeting maker that users across different companies can use. It helps you pick the best time for a meeting by sending out emails to invitees, letting them choose the best times for them, and then sending you a summary of those best dates. You pick the

final date, Diarised notifies everyone via email, and your meeting is scheduled.

**Windows Live Events**

Event scheduling is now part of Microsoft’s bag of tricks. Microsoft’s Windows Live Events (home.services.spaces.live.com/events/) is a customized version of its Live Spaces offering; it lets Live Spaces users organize events and share activities between participants. To schedule an event, you set up a list of invitees and then send out a mass email with a link back to your Live Event site. (All the event details are also available as an RSS feed.) Information about the event is posted on the site itself, which also serves as a place for attendees to come back after the event and share their photos, videos, and blog posts about the event. With its user-friendly consumer features, Live Events isn’t robust enough (or

professional enough) for most business users. It is, however, a nice way to plan more personal and informal events.

**Schedulebook**

Schedulebook (www.schedulebook.com) offers several different types of webbased scheduling services. Depending on the application, you can use Schedulebook to schedule employees, customers, or other interested parties.

The company’s three offerings are

\_ **Schedulebook Professionals**, which is a business-oriented schedule/calendar/planning application

\_ **Schedulebook Office**, which schedules the use of any shared resource, such as company meeting rooms or even vacation homes

\_ **Schedulebook Aviation**, which is used by the aviation industry to schedule aircraft, flight training, and similar services

**Acuity Scheduling**

If you run a business that requires scheduling appointments with clients or customers, Acuity Scheduling (www.acuityscheduling.com) can help ease your scheduling operations. Acuity Scheduling lets you clients schedule their own appointments 24/7 via a web-based interface, like the one in Figure 7.12; you

don’t have to manually schedule any appointment. You can make the scheduling operation as simple or as complex as you like. For example, some businesses might include new client information forms as part of the online scheduling process. And, of course, the web-based software eliminates scheduling conflict, making for a more efficient schedule for you.

**AppointmentQuest**

Like Acuity Scheduling, AppointmentQuest (www.appointmentquest.com) is designed to solve the scheduling problems of busy professionals. This application not only enables clients to make and you to accept appointments over the web, it also lets you manage personnel, schedules, and other calendarrelated

items.

**hitAppoint**

Our last scheduling application, hitAppoint (www.hitappoint.com), also enables online client booking. Like the previous similar application, it’s ideal for any business that requires the making of customer appointments—barbershops, hair salons, doctor and dentist offices, consultants, financial advisors,

car repair shops, computer technicians, and the like.

**Exploring Online Planning and Task Management**

Now let’s pivot from schedules to tasks. Planning and task applications let you manage everything from simple to-do lists to complex group tasks, all over the Internet and collaboratively with other users.

**iPrioritize**

Sharing to-do lists is important for families, community groups, and businesses. Your to-do list might be as simple as a grocery list or as complex as a list of activities for a community program or business project. Whatever the application, iPrioritize (www.iprioritize.com) is a good basic to-do list manager. authorized users can create a new to-do list, add items to the list, prioritize tasks by dragging them up and down the list, and mark items complete when finished. And, because it’s web based, you can access your lists anytime and anyplace. When you have a list, you can print it out, email it to someone else, subscribe

to changes in the list via RSS, and even view lists on your mobile phone— which is a great way to consult your grocery list when at the supermarket!

**Bla-Bla List**

Bla-Bla List (www.blablalist.com) is another simple to-do list manager. It’s web based, of course, so you can access your lists from any location at any time. You can even publish your lists via RSS so that family and coworkers can get instant updates.

**Hiveminder**

Hiveminder (www.hiveminder.com) is similar to all the previously discussed to-do list managers. What’s nice about Hiveminder is that you can enter list items in a kind of freeform fashion, and it will help you create and prioritize lists based on your “brain dumps.”

**Remember the Milk**

When you need to “remember the milk” at the grocery store, check out the aptly named Remember the Milk (www.rememberthemilk.com) web-based todo list manager. Once you create a list, you can arrange reminders via email, instant messaging, or text messages to your mobile phone.

**Ta-da List**

Here’s another web-based to-do list manager. Ta-da List ([www.tadalist.com](http://www.tadalist.com)) lets you make all sorts of lists, share them with friends, family, and coworkers, and then check off items as they’re completed.

**Tudu List**

Tudu List (www.tudulist.com) is a little different from other to-do list managers in that it also includes a web-based calendar. Items are added both to the appropriate to-do list and to your calendar, on the date they’re due.

**TaskTHIS**

TaskTHIS (taskthis.darthapo.com) is similar to most other to-do list managers, but offers the ability to add extended notes to any individual task. You can publish your tasks via RSS or share with others via the web.

**Vitalist**

Like other to-do list managers, Vitalist (www.vitalist.com) organizes all sorts of tasks and projects. It’s unique in that it uses the Getting Things Done (GTD) workflow methodology popularized by management consultant David Allen.

**TracksLife**

Trackslife (www.trackslife.com) is a database-oriented task manager. Each

“track” is a separate database that combines columns of money, numbers,

words, paragraphs, and yes/no responses. The application sends out

reminders of critical events via email or RSS.

**Voo2Do**

Voo2Do (www.voo2do.com) moves beyond simple to-do list management into more sophisticated priority management. This web-based application lets you set up different projects, organize tasks by project, track time spent and remaining on a given task or project, publish task lists, and even add tasks

via email. As you can see in Figure 7.14, Voo2Do tracks pending and completed tasks via

a simple dashboard. To view tasks sorted by project, click the Projects tab.

**HiTask**

More sophisticated task management can be had with HiTask (www.hitask.com), a business-oriented task manager. Tasks are added to your calendar and color tagged for easy viewing. The task manager and scheduler both utilize drag-and-drop editing, and you can share and assign tasks and projects to a group of people via the web.

**Zoho Planner**

Zoho Planner (planner.zoho.com) is perhaps the most sophisticated task planner evaluated here. Its features and functionality approach those of the project management applications we discuss in Chapter 10, “Collaborating on Project Management. With Zoho Planner, you create a new page for each project you’re working on, To that project, you add lists with individual to-dos within each list. Each list item can include extensive notes as well as images. You can share each project page with users you designate. Each todo item also appears on your central calendar. Zoho Planner is ideal for anyone managing small- to medium-sized projects. It’s probably overkill for simple to-do list management (try iPrioritize or

Remember the Milk, instead), and not powerful enough for large corporate projects. But for the average home or community project, it’s an ideal solution— just enough versatility to handle disparate types of projects, but not so complex as to scare off nontechnical users.

**Collaborating on Word Processing**

Just about everyone who uses a computer uses a word processing program. You use your word processor— most likely some version of Microsoft Word—to write memos, letters, thank you notes, fax coversheets, reports, newsletters, you name it. The word processor is an essential part of our computing lives. But what do you do when you don’t have your word processor at hand? Maybe you’re visiting your parents’ home for the holidays and you want to catch up on your memo writing, but your folks don’t have a computer in the house—orthey do, but it doesn’t have Word installed. Or maybe you’reon a short business trip, without your trusty notebook PC, and you need to fire off a short letter for work. Or perhaps

you’re a student on campus with an assignment due, and you left your computer back in the dorm.

In short, what do you do when you don’t have Microsoft Word handy? The solution, believe it or not, lies in theclouds—in the form of a web-based word processor. That’s right, there are a number of web-based replacements for Microsoft’s venerable Word program.

 All of these programs let you write your letters and memos and reports from any computer, no installed software necessary, as long as that computer has a connection to the Internet. And every document you create is housed on the web, so you don’t have to worry about taking your work with you. It’s cloud computing at its most useful, and it’s here today.

**How Web-Based Word Processing Works**

Microsoft Word is a software program that is installed on your computer’s hard disk. Web-based word processors, in contrast, are hosted in the cloud, not on your hard drive—as are the documents you create with these applications. And these web-based applications mimic the key features of Microsoft Word,

so you don’t give up much in the way of functionality. Read on to learn more.

**Benefits of Web-Based Word Processors**

As you’re by now well aware, the most obvious benefit of using a cloud service is that your documents can be accessed wherever you are, from any PC. With a web-based word processing application, you’ll never discover that the document you need is located on your office PC when you’re at home or away.

Also nice is that, by being web based, you can easily share your documents with others. That makes real-time workgroup collaboration possible from anywhere around the globe, which is something you don’t have with Microsoft Word and similar desktop software programs. Another benefit of being web based is that you can’t lose your work—theoretically, anyway. After you’ve named the document you’re working on, the webbased word processor saves your file on its cloud of servers. From that point on, every change you make to the document gets saved to the cloud servers automatically. Nothing gets lost if you close your web browser, navigate to another website, or even turn off your computer. Everything you do is saved on the web. Best of all, most of these web-based applications are free. That’s free, as in it costs zero dollars, unlike the ever increasingly expensive Microsoft Office suite. Being free makes it easy to take for a test drive, and even easier to add to your bag of applications. Many early users who’ve tried these web-based applications have said that they’re likely to switch from Microsoft Word. These cloud services can perform nearly all of Word’s basic functions, which makes them perfect for corporate and small business environments.

**Should You Use a Web-Based Word Processor?**

Before you jump into the web-based word processing waters, you need to ask whether a cloud service is right for your particular needs. The answer, of course, is that it all depends. Here are the following users for whom web-based word processing holds promise:

\_ **Beginning users**. If you’re just starting out in the word processing world, there’s no better place to start than with a web-based application. The slightly limited functionality of these cloud apps actually

works to the benefit of beginning users. You won’t be overwhelmed by all the advanced options that clutter the Microsoft Word menus. Plus, most of these web-based word processors are extremely easy to use; everything you need is right out in the open, not hidden inside layers of menus and dialog boxes. I’ll be honest with you—I wish I’d had a word processor like Google Docs 20 years ago, when I was learning

how to use PC-based word processing programs.

\_ **Casual users**. A web-based word processor is also a good choice if you have modest word processing needs. If all you’re doing is writing memos and letters, a web-based application gets the job done with

ease.

\_ **Anyone who wants access to their documents from multiple locations**. If you work on the same data at work and at home (or on the road), you know what a hassle it is to carry your data around with you from computer to computer—and keep it synchronized. A web-based word processor solves this problem. Wherever you are (home, office, on the road), you’re always accessing the same version of your document, stored in the cloud. There are no synchronization issues; you work on the same file wherever you go.

\_ **Anyone who needs to share their documents with others**. Sometimes you need others to view what you’re working on. Maybe you have a family budget that you and your spouse both need to see. Maybe you have a soccer team schedule that other parents need to view. Whatever the need, a web-based word processor lets you share your documents with anyone you like, over the Internet.

\_ **Anyone who needs to edit their documents in a collaborative environment**. Sharing is one thing; collaborative editing is another. If you need multiple users to both access and edit data in a document, a web-based word processor lets you do things that are impossible in Microsoft Word. For example, I know of one entrepreneur who adopted Google Docs for his small telemarketing company. He has five employees making calls at the same time, all from their homes. He has all five employees work from the same document; they not only access the same call data, they also enter their results into the document—live, via the Internet. All that said, a web-based word processor isn’t for everyone. So who *shouldn’t*

use one of these applications?

\_ **Power users**. If you’ve created your own custom documents or templates in Microsoft Word, especially those with fancy macros and the like, a web-based word processor is not for you. Most of these cloud

applications lack Word’s most advanced features and just won’t get the job done.

\_ **Anyone who wants to create sophisticated printouts**. Most of today’s web-based word processors lack some of the more sophisticated formatting options that some Word users take for granted. With a word-based word processor, what you see onscreen is exactly what prints out—for better or for worse. If you need fancy printouts, a web-based application will probably disappoint.

\_ **Anyone working on sensitive documents**. Web-based applications (and documents stored on the web) are not good tools if your company has a lot of trade secrets it wants to protect. In fact, some organizations may bar their employees from working on documents that don’t reside on their own secured servers, which rules out a web-based word processor entirely.

\_ **Anyone who needs to work when not connected to the Internet**.

This is the blatantly obvious one, but if you’re not connected to the Internet, you can’t connect to and work with a web-based application. To work offline, you need Microsoft Word. So, if you’re a beginning or casual user who doesn’t need fancy printouts, or if you need to share your documents or collaborate online with other users, a web-based word processor is worth checking out.

**Exploring Web-Based Word Processors**

There are a half-dozen or so really good web-based word processing applications, led by the ever-popular Google Docs. We’ll start our look at these applications with Google’s application and work through the rest in alphabetic order.

 **Google Docs**

Google Docs (docs.google.com) is the most popular web-based word processor available today. Docs is actually a suite of applications that also includes Google Spreadsheets and Google Presentations; the

Docs part of the Docs suite is the actual word processing application. Like all things Google, the Google Docs interface is clean and, most important, it works well without imposing a steep learning curve. Basic formatting is easy enough to do, storage space for your documents is generous, and sharing/

collaboration version control is a snap to do.

Google Docs is based on the Writely webbased word processor, originally developed by the software company Upstartle. Google acquired Upstartle in March 2006, and subsequently mated it with its homegrown Google Spreadsheets application.



**FIGURE**

*The Google Docs home page—where all your documents are listed.*

The leftmost pane helps you organize your documents. You can store files in folders, view documents by type (word processing document or spreadsheet), and display documents shared with specific people.

The documents for the selected folder or filter are displayed in the main part of the window. As you can see, word processing documents are noted with a document icon, spreadsheets have a spreadsheet icon, and presentations have a presentation icon. To open any document, click the item’s title. The document

will open in a new window. To delete an item, select it and then click the Delete button.To create a new word processing document, click the New button and select Document. The new document opens in a new browser window2. Your document looks like a big blank space in this new browser window, one with a pull-down menu and toolbar at the top. You use the toolbar buttons and the functions on the pull-down menu to edit and format your document. As with all web-based word processors, when you create a Google Docs document, you’re actually creating an HTML document—just like a web page. All

HTML-type formatting is available for your documents, through the Google Docs interface. The document is also saved in HTML format, although you can export (download) the document in a number of other formats, including Microsoft Word DOC format and Adobe PDF. Of course, one of the most useful features of Google Docs is the capability to share a document with other Google Docs users,

either for viewing or for collaborative editing. To share a document or spreadsheet for viewing or collaboration, click the Share button and select Share with others.

This displays the Share This Document page, In the Invite People box, enter the email addresses of the people you want to share the document (separate multiple addresses with commas). If you want others to just view the document without being able to edit it, check the As Viewers option. If you want others to be able to edit the document, check the As Collaborators option. Click the Invite Viewers or Invite Collaborators button to send out the invitations. Your recipients now receive an invitation via email. The invitation contains a link to the document; clicking this link opens the document in a new browser

window. Invited viewers can navigate around the entire file and also save that file to their personal Google Docs online storage area or as a file to their own PC. Anyone invited as a collaborator can edit the file, in real time; in fact, multiple users can edit the document at the same time. It’s like each of you is

sitting next to each other, all typing away at the same keyboard at the same time. Finally, there’s a relatively new feature in Google Docs that some users might find beneficial: the ability to work on your documents offline, without an Internet connection.

 To use Google Docs Offline, as this feature is called, click the Offline link to download and install

Google Gears, a software tool that converts Google online apps into traditional desktop apps. While this defeats some of the aspects of cloud computing, it does let you work on your documents literally anywhere— even when there’s no Internet connection to be found. Bottom line, Google Docs is a good fullfeatured web-based word processor. Collaboration is easy, and you have the option of working on your documents offline if you like. And, although some competing applications may offer greater

formatting flexibility, none have near the installed base of users that Google Docs has.

**Adobe Buzzword**

Buzzword (buzzword.acrobat.com) is Adobe’s entry into the web-based word processor marketplace. Unlike Google Docs, Buzzword runs in Flash, which might be problematic for users with older PCs or those with slow Internet connections. That said, Flash implementation gives Buzzword a snazzy interface

and some advanced editing and formatting features. As you can see in Figure 11.4, the Buzzword interface is head and shoulders above the more utilitarian interface of Google Docs. In addition, Buzzword gives you full text and paragraph formatting, headers and footers, page numbering,

end notes, and keyboard shortcuts, none of which are currently available with Google Docs. You also get a running word count, inline spell checking as you type, the ability to insert comments, and a history of revisions made to a file. Those features make Buzzword a great tool for professional writers.

**ajaxWrite**

Unlike most other web-based word processors, ajaxWrite ([www.ajaxwrite.com](http://www.ajaxwrite.com)) doesn’t work with Internet Explorer. Instead, you have to use the Firefox web browser. This not unimportant caveat aside, ajaxWrite’s simple interface and clean workspace makes it well liked by many users.

ajaxWrite looks a lot like Microsoft Word, which makes it easy to start using the program right away. New documents open in their own windows, complete with Word-like pull-down menus and toolbars.

It’s a familiar experience, even if it doesn’t include all the paragraph and document formatting features you get with Word (or with Adobe Buzzword, for that matter). And here’s something else you don’t get with ajaxWrite: group collaboration. Unlike the other web-based word processors discussed in this chapter, ajaxWrite offers no sharing or collaboration features. It’s purely a single-user application.

**Docly**

Docly (www.docly.com) is an interesting application, designed especially for professional writers. What sets Docly apart from other web-based word processors is its focus on copyright management, including the ability to assign a document a Creative Commons license or a traditional “all rights reserved” license. This means that not only can you share and publish your Docly documents, you can also offer them for sale. Docly offers a minimalist approach to editing and formatting. The editing window itself is rather small, in part to make room for a bewildering number of formatting buttons in a toolbar on top. It’s

not the most elegant interface, but it gets the basic job done.

**Glide Write**

Glide Write (www.glidedigital.com) is part of the Glide Business suite of webbased applications. Glide Write itself is an elegant word processor that just happens to integrate seamlessly with other Glide applications, including email and chat. In addition, Glide documents can be viewed on a number of

smartphones, including the iPhone, T-Mobile SideKick, and a handful of Treo and BlackBerry models.

As you can see in Figure 11.7, a Glide Write document opens in its new window. You have the normal toolbar of editing and formatting functions on top, with the document displayed below. Along the side are three tabs: Email, Share, and Chat. Click the Share tab and Glide displays a window that lets you designate which contacts you want to share with. These contacts then receive an email that includes a link to the web-based document’s URL, where they can view or edit the document as desired.

**iNetWord**

The iNetWord (www.inetword.com) web-based word processor is a full-featured application.iNetWord features a tabbed interface, with each open document appearing on its own tab. You get support for page backgrounds, borders, page numbering, tables, images, and the like. It even comes with a number of predesigned templates for common types of documents. For group collaboration, iNetWord lets you share individual documents or entire folders. Changes made by other users are highlighted onscreen, and it’s

easy to revert back to a previous version.

**KBdocs**

As evident in Figure 11.9, KBdocs (www.kbdocs.com) is a no-frills online word processor. There are only limited formatting options, and it doesn’t have any sharing or collaboration features. That said, it’s probably the easiest-to-use web-based word processor, especially for newbies; just pick a username and

password, click Enter, and you’re ready to go.

**Peepel WebWriter**

Peepel WebWriter (www.peepel.com) is part of a multi-application web-based office suite. As you can see in Figure 11.10, the Peepel interface is a trifle unusual: The document you’re editing appears in its own window, on top of the larger home window that holds the toolbar and tabs that you use to edit

and format the document. If you can get past this little quirk, Peepel offers some interesting features, including the ability to edit your documents offline if you don’t have an Internet connection. Group collaboration is a snap. After you’ve saved a document, click the Sharing tab to see all of Peepel’s sharing options. You can assign Read and Write access to different users; all you need to supply is each collaborator’s email address.

**ThinkFree Write**

ThinkFree Write (www.thinkfree.com) is a Java-based online word processor. That lets Think Free mimic the Word 2003 interface. Each new document opens in its own window, each of which has a Word-like pull-down menu and toolbar. The editing and formatting functions are also quite Word-like, complete with styles, editing marks, fields, an autocorrect function, and the like.

**WriteBoard**

If collaboration is your game, consider WriteBoard (www.writeboard.com), a web-based word processor designed with group collaboration in mind. WriteBoard isn’t the most full-featured word processor on the web, but it does make collaboration between multiple users remarkably easy. As you can see in Figure 11.12, WriteBoard’s interface defines the term *bare bones*. It’s so bare boned, in fact, that you have to enter formatting codes into the text, kind of like the way WordStar worked 25 years ago. (And who wants

to do that?) But creating pretty documents is not what WriteBoard’s about. What it really is, is a wiki-style group text editor. After you create a document and share it with others, it’s easy to compare different versions of the document; every time you or someone else saves an edit, a new version of the document is created and linked to in the sidebar. You can even subscribe to RSS feeds for your documents,

so you’ll be automatically notified of changes.

**Zoho Writer**

Zoho’s web-based applications always end up being the last discussed in this book, thanks to the company’s last-of-the-alphabet name. That said, Zoho is seldom the last company I think of when I’m evaluating cloud services. In most instances, Zoho is right up with Google in terms of functionality and features. Case in point: Zoho Writer (writer.zoho.com), which easily holds its own, if not surpasses, Google Docs in the web-based word processor race multiple documents display in a single window, thanks to Zoho Writer’s tabbed interface. You get all the standard editing and formatting features, as well as page numbering, headers and footers, footnotes and endnotes, tables of contents, and other advanced features not found in all other web-based word processors. Naturally, Zoho Writer offers robust sharing and collaboration features. You can share a document with individuals or with groups on either a read- only or read/write basis. Sharing is as easy as clicking the Share tab;. Enter the email addresses of individuals (or the names of predefined groups), select the permission level, and then click the Share button. The chosen collaborators will receive an email inviting them to the shared document on the web.

**Storing and Sharing Files and Other Online Content**

Cloud computing isn’t just about accessing applications over the web. The cloud can also be used to store documents, either as a giant backup drive or as your primary source of file storage. In addition, you can use the cloud to store and share your favorite websites. By putting your favorites online, you can

share them with all your friends—no email or instant messaging necessary. (When stored on the cloud, you can also access your favorites when you’re using another computer, which is great when you’re traveling or out of the office.) Read on, then, to learn more about these two similar but different ways to store things in the cloud.

**Understanding Cloud Storage**

The first form of web-based data storage we’ll examine is called *cloud storage*. This is a form of networked data storage where data files are stored on multiple virtual servers.

**What Is Cloud Storage?**

The servers used for cloud storage are typically hosted by third-party companies who operate large data centers. When you subscribe to a cloud storage service, you lease storage capacity from the cloud storage

service. You then have access to the contracted amount of storage space, which you access via the Internet. What you see looks like a single server or hard disk, but it’s really just a virtual server.

 In reality, your data may be stored across multiple servers, sometimes spanning multiple locations (or even continents!) that then appear to be a single server in your storage dashboard. Know that true cloud storage is massive. We’re not talking mere gigabytes and terabytes, as you might find on a desktop PC or web server. Instead, a cloud storage service might offer multiple petabytes of storage. The best-known cloud storage service today is probably Amazon.com’s Simple Storage Service (S3). Cloud storage is also offers by many other companies, with services either planned or rumored from IBM, Google, and EMC.

**Why Use Cloud Storage?**

Why is cloud storage such a big deal—especially to large companies?

There are three primary benefits to cloud storage:

\_ **Scalability**. When you rent cloud storage space, you can opt to use as much or as little space as you need. It’s easy to “flip and switch” and increase your storage space if you suddenly have larger storage needs. You don’t have to buy the additional computers required to house the extra data, but rather can use more of the space available in the cloud (and feel free to use as much space as you need).

**Reliability**. If you’ve ever had your company’s server go down, you know how important it is to have access to backup data. Well, cloud storage can be used as giant online backup drive. Even if you rely on

cloud services for your primary data storage, you still have the peace of mind that comes from knowing your data is duplicated on multiple servers.

\_ **Lower costs**. How much do you pay per terabyte of storage? Even with hard disk prices coming down, it’s still cheaper to use the virtual servers in the cloud. Cloud storage services can offer lower storage rates because they more efficiently use the server space they have; space gets reassigned to users almost instantly, on an as-needed basis. It’s a lot cheaper to use excess space in the cloud than it is to purchase

a new server or hard disk drive.

**Risks of Storing Data in the Clouds**

Of course, some risk is associated with using cloud storage services. Let’s look at the most talked-about issues:

\_ **Reliability**. Remember when I said cloud storage is more reliable than traditional physical storage? That might not always be the case. What do you do when your cloud service provider has technical problems and either goes offline (which means you can’t access your data) or actually loses stored data? It’s happened before. Amazon had a well publicized outage of its storage service in February 2008. If a cloud storage service doesn’t have adequate infrastructure or doesn’t maintain multiple backups, your data could be at risk.

\_ **Security**. While all cloud storage providers tout how secure their systems are, there still exists the possibility that high-tech thieves could break into the system and view or steal your sensitive data. It’s almost always less safe to store your data elsewhere than where you have physical control over it.

\_ **User error**. Not all reliability security issues originate with the cloud storage provider. Given that you employ fallible human beings to manage your systems, it’s not inconceivable that someone could inadvertently let a password slip, or enter an incorrect web address. All it takes is one simple mistake to expose your data to unauthorized users or permanently delete data you don’t want to delete.

**Access problems**. Because you’re accessing your data over an Internet connection, you’re in big trouble if that connection goes down—either on your end or with your cloud storage provider. And the connection doesn’t have to go completely down to cause problems; latency in accessing data is an issue with any Internet connection, even the fastest ones. Slow connections, of course, present problems of their own, in terms of time it takes to upload and download files. With all these caveats in place, it makes sense to back up data in at least two places, and not rely exclusively on the cloud for all your storage needs.

Whatever you store in the cloud should also be stored somewhere more accessible, for safety’s sake.

**Evaluating Online File-Storage and -Sharing Services**

Where online can you store your valuable data? Let’s look at some of the more popular cloud storage services—many of which also offer file-sharing capabilities.

**Amazon S3**

The Amazon Simple Storage Service (S3) provides unlimited online storage. You access your stored data via a simple web interface. S3 launched in March 2006, making it one of the most established online storage services in today’s market. Amazon charges fees for the amount of data stored and for the bandwidth used in uploading and downloading that data. In the United States, you pay $0.15 per gigabyte of storage used, plus a data transfer fee that ranges between $0.10 and $0.17 per gigabyte transferred.

One of the selling points for S3 is that it uses the same scalable storage infrastructure that Amazon.com uses to run its own global e-commerce website. You access Amazon S3 by going to aws.amazon.com and clicking the Amazon Simple Storage Service link.

**Egnyte**

Egnyte (www.egnyte.com) provides online file storage, backup, and sharing. You can easily designate authorized users with whom to share specific files and folders, complete with automatic file versioning.

Access to the Egnyte service is via the simple web interface. You set up a virtual online file server that you configure according to your specific needs.

You can then designate shared folders and subfolders with different permissions for power users and standard users. Uploading files is as easy as clicking a few buttons. Anything you upload to your shared folders can then be shared with other users you authorize.



*Managing uploaded files with Egnyte.*

**ElephantDrive**

ElephantDrive (www.elephantdrive.com) is a user-friendly online file-storage service. They offer three different versions of different-sized users: Home Edition, Pro Edition, and Pro Plus Edition. Each edition has different storage and transfer limits. The Home Edition is priced at an affordable $9.95/month.

**Microsoft Office Live Workspace**

We first discussed Microsoft Office Live Workspace (workspace.office.live.com) back in Chapter 12, “Collaborating on Spreadsheets.” Think of Live Workspace as a specialized cloud storage service; you can use it to store Microsoft Office documents and Office documents only. In addition, you’re limited to the number of documents you can store, typically around 1,000 per user. The nice thing about Office Live Workspace is that it’s free—although you do need to own the Microsoft Office suite to create your Office documents, of course. This makes it a great way to store your main or backup copies of your Word,Excel, and PowerPoint documents. You can also access your documents from any location, whether you’re in the office, at home, or on the road. What you can’t do, however, is store non-Office documents, which makes it a rather limited data-storage service.

**Mosso**

Mosso (www.mosso.com) is a business ready cloud hosting platform. Both storage and bandwidth scale automatically as needed; you pay on a per-gigabyte basis for what you actually use. You can use Mosso to host anything from individual files to complete websites. In fact, Mosso let you serve as your own website hosting service, complete with domain registration and client billing services.

**myDataBus**

The myDataBus service (www.mydatabus.com) is a combination cloud storage and file-sharing service. You can use myDataBus to store your individual files or to share photos, videos, and music with your friends and family. The service also offers group collaboration tools and integration with Facebook,

MySpace, LiveJournal, and other similar sites.

**Nirvanix**

If your storage needs are larger, consider Nirvanix ([www.nirvanix.com](http://www.nirvanix.com)). Nirvanix is a cloud storage platform optimized for large files and large enterprise-level customers. The Nirvanix Storage Delivery Networkintelligently stores, delivers, and processes storage requests in the best network location. Storage is offered on an on-demand, completely scalable basis.

**steekR**

As you can see in Figure 15.2, steekR (www.steekr.com) is designed especially for consumers who want to share their documents and media files online. After you’ve uploaded a file, you can share it with anyone in your contact list. You can also opt to make specific files editable by other, or assign them readonly restrictions. The basic steekR service, with 1GB of storage, is free. Paid plans, with up to

100GB of storage, are also available.

**Windows Live SkyDrive**

Now we come to Microsoft’s second cloud storage service. Windows Live SkyDrive (skydrive.live.com) differs from Office Live Online in that you can use it to store any type of file, not just Office files. You get 5GB of free storage, and can easily share your uploaded files with others you authorize via shared

or public folders. Personal folders are used for files you want to keep private. As you can see in Figure 15.3, uploading and managing your files is accomplished via an easy-to-use graphical dashboard. Just click a folder to view its contents or open an individual file. It’s quick and easy, ideal for home orsmall business users—including those who want to collaborate over the web with other users.

**Exploring Online Bookmarking Services**

There’s one more type of web-based data sharing service that bears discussing. This type of service lets you share your notes and favorite websites with your friends and colleagues—or with yourself, if you’re on another computer. It works like this. You visit a website you like and decide you want to bookmark

it or share it with others. Because bookmarks and favorites work only on a single computer, you instead save the site (and any notes you have about it) to an online bookmarking site. This saves your bookmark and notes to the cloud; you can then email the link to friends, or access it yourself at a later time.

So-called notebook sites work in much the same fashion, but with random text notes you may take on any subject. Just upload your notes to the site, and then access them or share them via the web. To give you an idea of what’s available, let’s survey just a few of the more popular bookmarking and notebook sites.

**BlinkList**

BlinkList (www.blinklist.com) is an easy-to-use bookmarking site. When you sign up for the (free) service, you install a small applet in your web browser. This applet adds a Blink This Site link to your browser’s favorites list. Click this link when you find a site you want to save; this displays the Blinking dialog box shown in Figure 15.4. Enter any notes you have about the site, and then click the Blink button. (You can also use this dialog box to send a link to the site to friends and family.) The site now appears on your BlinkList My List page, along with all the other sites you’ve “blinked.”

**ClipClip**

ClipClip (www.clipclip.org) does more than just bookmark favorite websites; it lets you clip and save text and images from websites and blogs to an online notebook. You can store and organize your clips for future use (great for research) or share them with others. You clip images and text by selecting them in your web browser (using your mouse) and then clicking the ClipClip button or link. The clips are thenuploaded to the ClipClip website, where you can view them yourself or share them with other users. (Figure 15.5 shows how ClipClip stores and displays the items you clip.)

**Clipmarks**

Clipmarks (www.clipmarks.com) functions much like ClipClip. You can clip any type of content from a web page and save it to the Clipmarks website. You can then access your clips at a later time from any Internet-connected computer, or share your clips with other users.

**del.icio.us**

The del.icio.us site is known by its unusual name, which is also its web address (del.icio.us). Shown in Figure 15.6, del.icio.us calls itself a social bookmarking site, in that it lets users store and share website bookmarks. In reality, del.icio.us is perhaps the most popular of these cloud bookmarking sites,

with more than 3 million users and more than 100 million bookmarked URLs. The site is now owned by Yahoo!

As with most of these sites, del.icio.us uses tags to help users find bookmarked sites. When you bookmark a site (often by clicking the del.icio.us button embedded on the site), you add a few keywords to describe the site. Other users can then search by keywords to find the most popular matching bookmarked sites.

**Feedmarker**

Feedmarker (www.feedmarker.com) is another bookmarking site. It’s unique in that it also functions as a newsreader for RSS and Atom feeds. You can also add newsfeeds as bookmarks.

**SharedCopy**

SharedCopy (www.sharedcopy.com) is billed as a “collaborative annotation service.” What that means is that you can save a copy of any web page to the SharedCopy site, while making all sorts of notes and highlights to that page. You can then share the annotated page with others of your choosing.

**Tagseasy**

Tagseasy (www.tagseasy.com) is an unusual combination of bookmarking, notebook, and cloud storage service. You can bookmark individual websites and share them with friends and colleagues, as well as upload and share individual documents (up to 1GB total storage). It’s a free service, so you might

want to check it out.

**Yahoo! MyWeb**

Yahoo! MyWeb (myweb.yahoo.com) is a simple online bookmarking service. You can easily save any bookmark to the MyWeb site, and then access it from any computer or share it with friends and colleagues.

**Exploring Online Photo-Editing Applications**

Let’s start with those web-based applications you can use to edit your digital photos. After all, not every picture you take is perfect; sometimes a quick fix can turn a bad photo into an acceptable one.What can you do with an online photo-editing program? While you don’t have quite the number of options you do with most desktop photo editing software, you do get all the basics. You can crop and rotate your photos, color correct them, fix the red-eye problem, adjust contrast and brightness, and even combine multiple photos into a photo collage. Most of these cloud applications work by having you upload your photo to

the editing site first. You then make the edits you want, often by clicking a “quick fix” button of some sort. Your edited photo is then downloaded back toyour computer for archiving.

**Adobe Photoshop Express**

The first web-based photo-editing application we’ll discuss is also arguably the best. Adobe Photoshop Express (www.photoshop.com/express/) has a stellar lineage, coming from the same company that brings you Photoshop CS, the number-one photo-editing program for serious photographers. As the name

implies, Photoshop Express is kind of a quick-and-dirty version of the fullfeatured Photoshop CS, with all the basic editing controls you need to fix the most common photo problems. Best of all, it’s completely free. You start using Photoshop Express by uploading those photos you want to edit. Your uploaded photos appear in the online library shown in Figure 16.1. To edit a photo, double-click that photo in the library. The Photoshop Express editing window, shown in Figure 16.2, offers a variety of different editing options, grouped as follows:

\_ **Basics**. Crop, rotate, auto correct, exposure, red-eye removal, touchup (a blur effect to remove scratches and blemishes), and color saturation .control

\_ **Tuning**. White balance, highlight, fill light, sharpen, and soft focus.

\_ **Effects**. Pop color, change hue, black & white, tint, sketch, and distort This is far and away the largest collection of editing and enhancement options of any online photo editor. Suffice to say, just about anything that’s wrong with a photo, you can fix online with Photoshop Express.



**FIGURE**

*Uploaded images in the Photoshop Express online library.*



**FIGURE**

*Editing an image with Photoshop Express.*

Adobe lets you store up to 2GB of photos. And, like many other web-based photo editors, Photoshop Express is integrated with Flickr, so you can upload your edited photos to the Flickr site with a minimum of fuss and muss.

**FotoFlexer**

FotoFlexer (www.fotoflexer.com), like Photoshop Express, is completely free to use. It offers similar editing options as Photoshop Express, with even more interesting enhancement tools. As you can see in Figure 16.3, the FotoFlexer editing window displays your currently uploaded photo in a tabbed interface. Each tab is designed for a particular editing/enhancement task, with its own row of option buttons along

the top. For example, the Basic tab includes buttons for Auto Fix, Fix Red Eye, Crop, Resize, Rotate, Flip, Adjust (hue, saturation, and lightness), and Contrast. Other tabs let you apply special effects, decorations, animations, and distortions. The Layers tab even lets you use multiple layers for editing

and effects.

**Picnik**

Picnik (www.picnik.com) is one of the easier-to-use web-based photo-editing applications. As you can see in Figure 16.4, the editing functions include the basics: auto-fix, rotate, crop, resize, exposure, colors, sharpen, and red-eye removal. Click any button to display the control for that particular option.

You can also apply a variety of special effects by clicking the Create tab. Here you can apply effects like black and white, sepia, night vision, pencil sketch, film grain, and the like. Just click a button to apply a given effect.

**Picture2Life**

As you can see in Figure 16.5, Picture2Life (www.picture2life.com) offers a combination of basic editing and special effects. The basic editing options include crop, resize, and rotate, as well as adjustments for brightness, contrast, color, and the like. The special effects include edge fades, Gaussian blur, emboss, pixelate, and the like. In addition, Picture2Life lets you create collages and animated GIF files from your photos.

**Pikifx**

Pikifx (www.pikifx.com) is perhaps the simplest and easiest-to-use online photo editor I’ve found. As you can see in Figure 16.6, you have some very basic options at the top of the page; you can resize or crop your photo, or add borders, text, or various special effects. Applying an effect is as easy as clicking the thumbnail for that effect; there are no sliders or controls to adjust.

**Preloadr**

Preloadr (www.preloadr.com) is interesting for two reasons. First, it’s tightly integrated with Flickr. In fact, you have to log in to your Flickr account to access the Preloadr editor. Second, Preloadr offers a variety of professional editing tools not found on other editing sites, such as layers, curves, histograms,

and the like. After you log in, you’re shown a list of all the photos you’ve previously uploaded to Flickr. You can then edit any of these photos, using either the basic interface or the advanced tools shown in Figure 16.7. After you’ve editing a photo, you can then replace the previous version on Flickr with the

newly edited version.

**Phixr**

Phixr (www.phixr.com) is a free online photo editor with basic editing functions. As Phixr’s editing interface resembles that of Photoshop and other popular photo-editing programs; the basic editing options are available via the buttons to the left of the main picture. Phixr lets you rotate, crop, or flip a photo. You can also adjust color, make the photo black and white or sepia tone, add text or cartoon bubbles, and apply a variety of special effects.

**Pixenate**

Pixenate (www.pixenate.com) also offers a button-oriented editing interface you apply an effect by clicking the button to the left of the picture. Just the Undo button if you don’t like the results.

**Snipshot**

Snipshot (www.snipshot.com), formerly known as Pixoh, offers a snazzy editing interface. when you click a button above your picture, the associated control appears onscreen. Click the Effects button,

for example, and the Effects control pops up. You get all the basic editing controls (tint, exposure, contrast, saturation, hue, sharpness, crop, and resize) as well as a bevy of special effects. Unlike some

other cloud services, Snipshot lets you edit really large images—up to 10MB in size, or 5000 x 5000 pixels.

**Exploring Photo-Sharing Communities**

Editing your photos with a web-based application is convenient; you can do your editing from any computer, no software installation necessary. Even more convenient is the ability to share your photos with others through the cloud, via web-based photo-sharing communities. On the surface, all of these photo-sharing sites look and feel quite similar. You choose your photos to upload, organize them in albums or folders, and select whether they’re private or public. Some sites let your friends download your photos; others only allow online viewing. Some sites even let you or your friends make prints of your photos—for a fee, of course. And the most robust sites include topic-oriented groups and communities

that let you share photos with like-minded photographers.

**Apple MobileMe Gallery**

One interesting part of Apple’s new MobileMe suite of web-based applications is the MobileMe Gallery (www.me.com). You can upload photos from your computer or iPhone to the MobileMe Gallery, which can then be viewed by anyone you invite. It’s a great way to get photos on and off your iPhone, and

view photos when you’re on the go. Figure 16.11 shows how MobileMe Gallery organizes your photos into easy-toview photo albums. The entire MobileMe suite is priced at $99 per year, and includes 20GB of total storage.

**dotPhoto**

The dotPhoto site (www.dotphoto.com) is free for personal users, but there’s a heavy push to order photo prints. Professional photographers can use dotPhoto to house photos displayed on their own websites—and collect a cut when users order prints.

**DPHOTO**

DPHOTO (www.dphoto.com) offers two levels of membership. The Lite version lets you store up to 1,000 photos for $3/month; the Pro version offers unlimited photo storage for $7/month. Like many of these sites, DPHOTO assignsyou your own personal web address for your photos, in the form of

*yourname*.dphoto.com.

**Flickr**

Of all the photo-sharing sites today, far and away the most popular among hobbyist and professional photographers is Flickr (www.flickr.com), part of the Yahoo! empire. As you can see in Figure 16.12, Flickr creates a home page for each photographer. From here, viewers can click a photo to view it full screen, or choose to view all photos as an onscreen slideshow. Uploading photos to Flickr is as easy as clicking a few links (after you’ve opened your free account, of course). Just go to Flickr’s home page and click the Upload Photos link. You’re then prompted to choose the files to upload and add tags and descriptions to each photo. The photos you upload are then added to your personal page for anyone (or selected users, if you made the photos private) to view. Flickr’s free accounts let you upload 100MB

of photos each month. If you need to upload more photos, or want more control over how your photos are displayed, consider paying for a Pro account. For $24.95/year, you get unlimited uploads and storage, as well as the ability to organize your photos into sets and collections. One of the best things about Flickr is the site’s community, expressed via comments on particular photos and a large number of topic-specific photo groups. The groups not only display photos from group members but also include discussion forums where members can talk about the topic at hand. If you’re at all interested in photography as a

hobby or profession, Flickr is the site to use.

**Fotki**

Fotki (www.fotki.com), like Flickr, offers both free and paid accounts. A free account gives you 50MB of storage space, and the $30/year premium account has unlimited storage and a variety of other features, including the ability to sell your photos from the Fotki site.

**MyPhotoAlbum**

MyPhotoAlbum (www.myphotoalbum.com), as the site’s name implies, focuses on displaying your digital photos in online photo albums. You get a unique web address for your album, which makes it easy to share your album with friends and family. You can even personalize your album with custom themes and layouts. And, best of all, it’s all free.

**Photobucket**

Photobucket (www.photobucket.com) is another free photo-sharing site. You can create photo albums for viewing on the Photobucket site or embed your Photobucket photos into your blog or Facebook or MySpace page.

**Picasa Web Albums**

Picasa Web Albums (picasaweb.google.com) is Google’s entrée into the photo sharing market. As you might suspect, Picasa Web Albums is closely integrated with Google’s Picasa photo-editing software, although it’s open for anyone to use—and it’s free. There’s also a neat mapping option that lets you

map where you took each photo, using Google Maps.

**Pixagogo**

Pixagogo (www.pixagogo.com) costs $5/month to use. For that, you can upload and store an unlimited number of photos. You also get your own personal photo gallery. For what it’s worth, the site also pushes hard on ordering prints, so keep that in mind when you’re doing your evaluating.

**PictureTrail**

PictureTrail (www.picturetrail.com) offers photo sharing, fancy online slideshows, and a photo editor that lets you add “bling,” in the form of fancy graphics, to your photos. Membership is free.

**SmugMug**

SmugMug (www.smugmug.com) is a photo-sharing community that aims to compete directly with Flickr. As such, SmugMug offers a slightly better-looking interface and unlimited storage, for $39.95/year. And, remembering the advantages of cloud storage, SmugMug keeps three copies of your photos on

servers housed in four different states, for more secure photo storage.

**WebShots**

WebShots (www.webshots.com) is an established photo-sharing community with many Flickr-like features. The free account lets you upload 1,000 photos (plus 100 more for each month of membership); the premium account lets you share 5,000 photos (plus 500 more for each month of membership) for

$2.49/month.

**Zenfolio**

Zenfolio (www.zenfolio.com) is designed as a place for professional photographers to store, show, and sell their work. The site offers three different hosting plans: Basic (1GB storage for $25/year), Unlimited (unlimited storage for $40/year), and Premium (unlimited storage and larger file sizes for $100/year).

**Zoto**

Our final photo-sharing site is Zoto (www.zoto.com), which offers unlimited storage for $19.95/year. Zoto lets users store and share photos on the Zoto site, in a variety of photo albums. You can also publish your Zoto photos to your blog or Flickr account.