

Reflection: Using Google Calendar in an educational setting

Joe Tompkins

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When I was first hired as a teacher, the county had just invested thousands of dollars in buying all faculty and staff an “organizational system”, which included a big padded binder with refillable calendar pages, task lists, pages to keep meeting notes, etc. The message was clear: Teachers need to be organized, and it should be done in a uniform way that everyone understands.

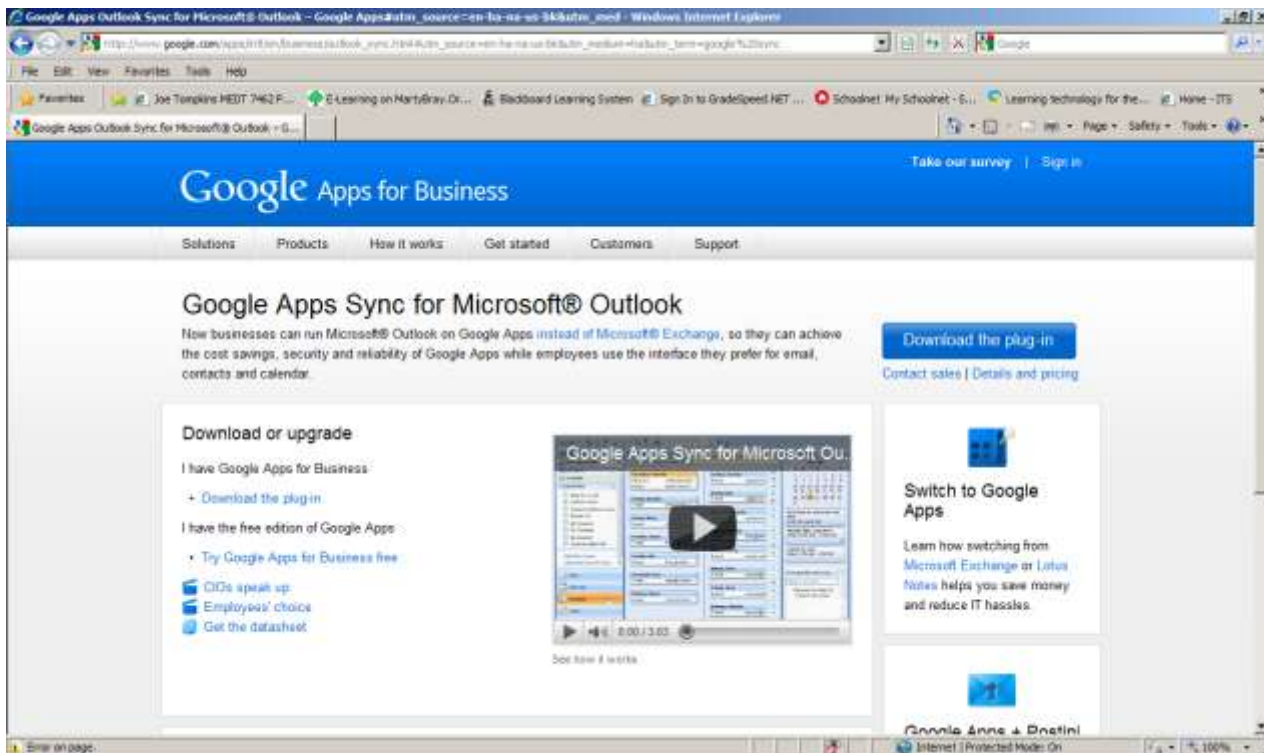
Soon after that, the county also invested in buying every student in the system an “Agenda”, which is essentially a spiral-bound calendar for students to write down assignments and deadlines. Again, the county recognized the need for a uniform organizational tool. (We still use these “Agendas” today...)

Slowly, teachers have begun transitioning to organizational tools that use technology. In our county, Microsoft Outlook provides those tools, but Google has provided a suite of excellent free tools that equal (and in some ways surpass) their paid counterparts.

Google Calendar is an excellent tool for educators, students, parents, and anyone else that needs to stay organized. The meeting invitations are a nice touch and blend well with the other collaborative tools Google offers. The interface is simple and clean and offers multiple views plus a printable calendar (which my mother uses to put up on her refrigerator. No kidding.)

I’ve been using Google Calendar myself for several years now, but I’ve been using it in a different way. Google Calendar is, for me, a “connector”.

Google Sync

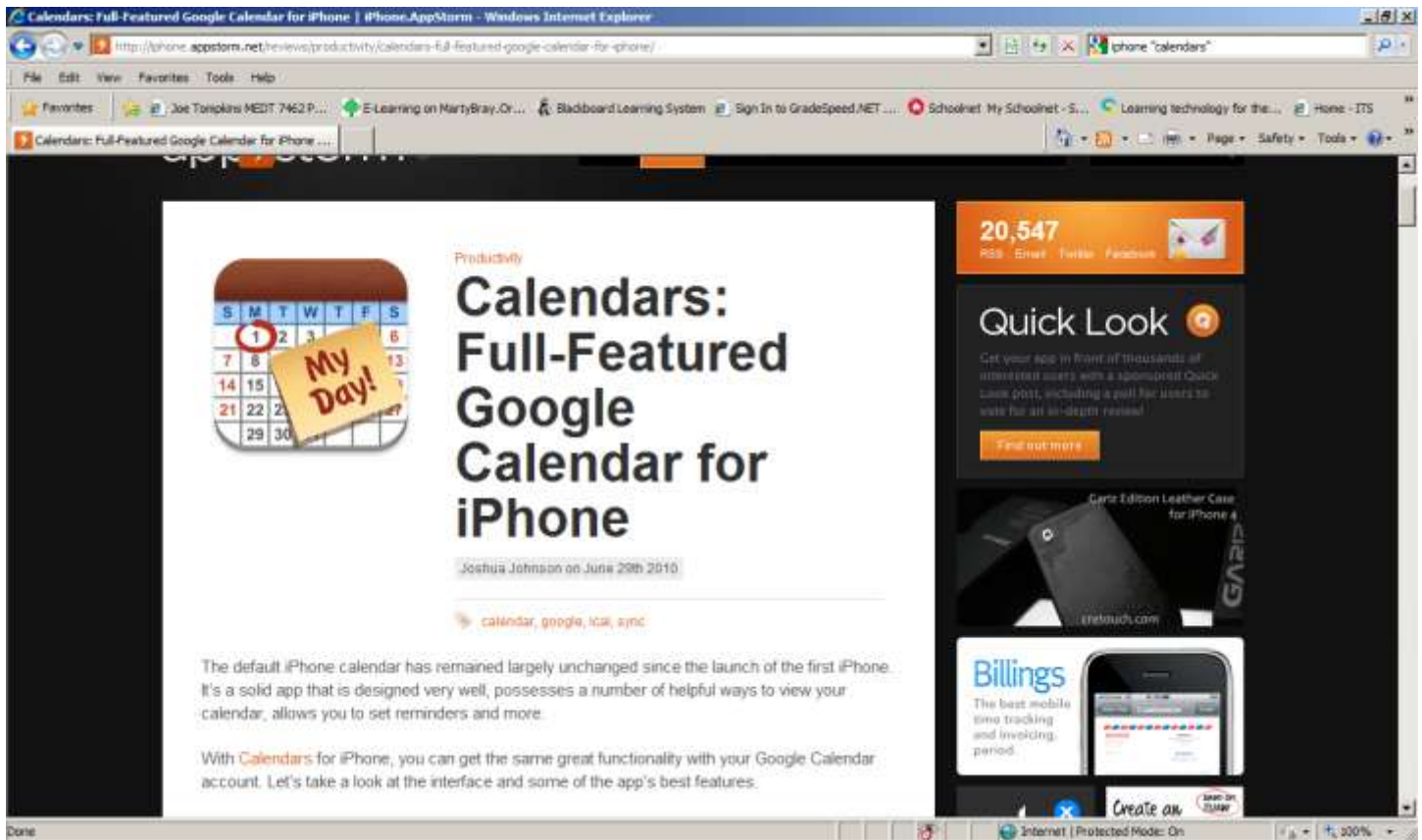


The screenshot shows the Google Apps Sync for Microsoft Outlook website. The page features a blue header with the Google Apps for Business logo and navigation links for Solutions, Products, How it works, Get started, Customers, and Support. The main content area is titled "Google Apps Sync for Microsoft® Outlook" and includes a "Download the plug-in" button. Below this, there are sections for "Download or upgrade" (with options for existing Google Apps for Business users and those with the free edition), a video player showing the product interface, and a "Switch to Google Apps" section with a link to learn more about switching from Microsoft Exchange or Lotus Notes.

Google Sync is a tool that synchronizes your Microsoft Outlook Calendar with your Google Calendar. It can work both ways, which means you put something on either calendar and it will be posted to both. Now, the real magic to this is that you can use this to synchronize two Microsoft Outlook Calendars. I have both my home and work computers synchronizing with the Google Calendar as the “connector”. This means that I can add something to my Microsoft calendar at work and it will show up on my Microsoft calendar at home (which is a different account.)

It’s all seamless and invisible, which is just as it should be. As a bonus, if either computer crashes, I have my calendar backed up online with Google.

“Calendars” for iPhone



Although not free, the “Calendars” app is worth the small investment (\$4.99). It is a full-featured calendar app that synchronizes with your Google Calendar seamlessly.

For me, this is fantastic because Google syncs both my home and work calendars as well... meaning my iPhone always has all of my appointments. (And if I add one on my phone, it shows up on all of my computers as well).

For educators and students, the benefits are clear. Students lose their printed “agendas” and calendars tied to a single PC are not always practical. With Google Calendar (and a few extra apps), students and teachers can have their calendars available to them almost anywhere... and that means a better chance of staying on task and meeting project deadlines.