

# Microsoft, Google in battle to win over students

December 17 2009, By Mike Swift

---

As they plunged into a project on ancient Egypt this fall, Jay Martino's Cupertino (Calif.) Middle School students probably didn't realize they were on the front lines of a high stakes battle between Google and Microsoft.

But the sixth graders who did the entire research project on a "walled" network of student websites using document-sharing software and e-mail provided by Google for free, are among the thousands of students worldwide that Google and Microsoft are fighting over.

With the recession taking a bite out of university endowments and public school budgets alike, the competition between Google and Microsoft to convert the nation's colleges, universities and schools to the companies' free e-mail and other IT services that run on the Internet "cloud" -- outsourcing that can save a large university hundreds of thousands of dollars a year -- has only grown more fierce. With Microsoft and Google fighting to baptize a future generation of computer users into their products, the stakes for both companies are significant.

The battle has already reshaped classroom technology. Just a year ago, Martino's sixth-graders would have generated reams of paper as they researched mummies, Cleopatra and King Tut. This fall, the students' work exists on the "cloud" -- bits of data flowing across Google's network, accessible from any computer with a web browser and a password.

"It really has empowered them," said Martino, a former software engineer who enthuses about the potential of Google Apps Education Edition to enhance students' collaborative skills.

Microsoft also provides its cloud-based educational software, called Live@edu, to schools for free.

"The benefit to Microsoft is that students are able to get familiar with Microsoft technology, and be more ready for the workforce," said Anna Kinney, director of Live@edu. "Students graduate from college and go into the workforce, ready on Day One to work on Microsoft products."

Microsoft announced in November that Live@edu has signed up more than 5,000 schools and universities around the world over the previous four months, and now has student users in over 100 countries. Both companies offer a menu of software that includes email, word processing, spreadsheets, storage space and the ability to create student Web sites.

At Google, trying to gain ground against a dominant Microsoft in commercial e-mail services, "we really look at this as an investment in our enterprise business," said Jeff Keltner, business development manager for Google Apps for Education. Plus, he said giving software to schools "is something that we felt was the right thing to do," an effort "that goes along with our oft-quoted, 'Don't be evil.'" Google has converted a number of local universities and K-12 schools to Gmail.

For both companies, "this is a proxy war for what's occurring in the commercial environment," said Matt Cain, lead e-mail analyst for the research firm Gartner.

If Google could use an advantage in educational e-mail to boost its commercial business, "it's a very significant threat to Microsoft," Cain

said. "So Microsoft is doing everything it can to stop commercial Gmail from being a success."

Neither Microsoft nor Google will disclose how much they spend to furnish those educational services, nor will they say exactly how many schools they have signed up. But with schools under budget pressure at both the university and K-12 level, administrators are weighing concerns about the security of their data on a cloud-based network against its powerful educational features, and against its price -- in most cases, zero.

At San Jose State University, where chief information officer Bill Maguire is considering switching about 29,000 students and 5,000 faculty and staff over to Google Apps, the annual savings could top \$300,000.

"It's substantial, especially at a time when we're getting hammered by budget reductions," Maguire said.

Google says it has 3 million active Apps for Education users in the U.S. and has seen a "tidal shift" in interest. "A vast number of schools are at least looking at student e-mail on a cloud provider," Keltner said.

After listening to pitches from both Microsoft and Google, UC-Davis converted about 30,000 students to Google Apps last year, in part because students were already familiar with Gmail and liked it. The students' new seven gigabyte in-boxes have over 100 times the capacity of the old system. Students kept their @ucdavis.edu address.

Like many other schools, security and privacy on Google's cloud was a worry for UC-Davis. That was one reason, said Gaston De Ferrari, of the university's IT department, why Davis chose not to convert faculty with students.

Both Google and Microsoft have been working to convince educators that their cloud-based networks are secure. And with students "ecstatic" about Google Apps, De Ferrari said UC-Davis is exploring the cost-savings and other benefits of switching faculty and staff over too.

[Microsoft](#) can also point to victories, such as Seton Hall University's recent decision to use Live@edu over Google Apps to provide mail and collaboration documents for its 10,000 students and 70,000 alumni.

And increasingly, their rivalry is playing out in high schools, middle schools and even elementary schools. At least in the San Francisco Bay area, Google appears to lead.

"There were a lot of other K-12 schools that were going with Google, and that gave us a lot of confidence," said Steve Taffee, technology director at the private Castelleja School in Palo Alto, which converted to Google Apps.

In the Cupertino Union [School](#) District, which covers parts of Sunnyvale as well as Cupertino, concerns about privacy and security were one reason why educators have moved more slowly -- not moving data like grades and other student records onto the [Google](#) cloud.

But teachers like Martino have quickly become fans. Start with the convenience -- any computer with a Web browser, PC or Mac, can open the cloud-based software. Allowing [students](#) to collaborate on a piece of writing, or a multimedia presentation, is crucial 21st-century skill, teachers say.

Martino said each student gets a website to store and display their work.

"It really gives them a feeling of ownership," Martino said. "It's theirs. It's not just an 8 { by 11 sheet of paper with black ink on it."

(c) 2009, San Jose Mercury News (San Jose, Calif.) Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.

Citation: Microsoft, Google in battle to win over students (2009, December 17) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-12-microsoft-google-students.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.