

Google Drops Gmail Beta Label in Nod to Enterprise

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Google stripped the beta label from its commercial Gmail services. This move eliminates a symbolic barrier to enterprise adoption and shows that Google is taking the enterprise market more seriously.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 7 July 2009, Google said it would remove the beta label from all components of the Google App Premier Edition (GAPE) suite. The company also announced several Gmail features for business customers, including mailbox delegation, mail retention controls, and functions to enhance reliability such as live replication of data to other locations for near-instant disaster recovery and special handling of business users' data to improve uptime.

Analysis

One of the perennial debates around Google's push into the commercial sector has been: "Does Google understand the enterprise?" Google's categorization of its commercial Gmail e-mail service as being in "beta" led some enterprises to conclude that the vendor was tone deaf to the needs of an enterprise. But Google viewed the beta label as a way to highlight its difference with established enterprise vendors — the label meant constant and persistent innovation.

The beta badge divided Google internally. Some argued that it hindered Google's penetration of the enterprise market while others contended that removing the label would strip Google of a valuable and fundamental difference with established competitors. The removal of the beta label, therefore, heralds the ascendance of pragmatists who have more experience in dealing with the corporate world. This largely symbolic move indicates Google's approach to the enterprise market is maturing.

More concretely, the new Gmail features respond to enterprises that have requested functions such as the ability to delegate access of a mailbox to an assistant and the ability to apply granular retention times to specific messages. These changes, along with recent improvements such as support for the BlackBerry and Microsoft Outlook, show that Google is listening and responding aggressively to enterprise concerns. Google is emerging as formidable challenger to Microsoft and IBM in the e-mail market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Enterprises:** Consider Google for hosted e-mail services, but conduct due diligence with a focus on its ability to meet e-mail operational policies and procedures.

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Google Gmail Support for Outlook Challenges Exchange" — We expect that Sync for Microsoft Outlook will have incomplete functions and that users will resist moving from Outlook to the Gmail client, thereby pressuring Google to fill in the functional gaps. **By Matt Cain and Tom Austin**
- "Vendor Focus: Google's GAPE Is Improving but Still Not Ready for High Growth" — This report discusses the 10 most important aspects of GAPE that Google must address. **By Tom Austin and others**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

This research is part of a set of related research pieces. See "Roundup of E-Mail Research Through 3Q09" for an overview.

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