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Accessing Remote Data Part 1

August 8, 2008 —Following up on details from the last post ([Every Small Business Has Two Locations](#)), let's look at some ways to access your data whether you're in the office, home, or on the road with Internet access.

Notice I didn't say "access your network" but rather access your data. One great way to share data with yourself in different locations and with coworkers is to store it online somewhere. Using any number of SaaS (Software as a Service) vendors allows you to save some or all of your work data on secure servers run by companies specializing in collaboration services. Since no "collaboration" companies can seem to break through into mainstream success, let's call this "group online storage" or "online workspaces" instead.

Simply put, these services create kind of a "Shared Documents" space on a hosted service, much like you can do with your Windows computer. And, of course, you can have your private "My Documents" space as well. Many offer both, because every worker in a team needs private document folders as well as access to group folders.

Once you're signed up with a service, you store your documents online, and you can access the service and your files through any browser. Some services also allow you to map a drive from your desktop to your online storage folders.

I've used a service called [HyperOffice](#) for a couple of years, and they offer private and shared folders and the mapped-drive desktop link. Like few other services, HyperOffice goes much further and offers a customizable portal page, e-mail, calendars, contacts, task list, notes, reminders, and a few other goodies. You can use HyperOffice to replace Microsoft Windows Exchange servers and still keep e-mail, shared calendars, task lists, and other Outlook features without the expense of an in-house Exchange server.

Check out other services like [InfoStreet](#), [eOfficeFiles](#), and even Microsoft's [OfficeLive Workspace](#) (beta). All will cost a few dollars per user per month. I've talked to HyperOffice customers using the service to run a business with affiliates and suppliers across 23 of the 24 world time zones.

If your needs are more modest, like sharing some info with a few people limited to notes, a place for everyone to comment on information, and stored files, you may do fine with a Wiki. Yes, the online service category with the funny name can easily share files among groups of users. I use [PBWiki](#), a free and paid service, for private and shared workspaces. Others wikis you'll see at the top of the search results include [WetPaint](#) and [WikiDot](#), among about two million others. Be sure you can upload and download files on your service, because not all Wikis support that feature.

Team wiki software has become quite popular, even if few people realize it yet. One wiki, [CentralDesktop](#), is moving toward offering more services and breaking out of the simple Wiki world. So you now have plenty of options to share files from anywhere with Internet access.

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