Office 365 is the brand name for a set of Microsoft product suites that are distributed over the cloud. What separates Office 365 from previous Office products is that it allows remote access to everyone's favorite Office apps (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) for a small monthly fee, instead of the previous method of users paying hundreds of dollars up front for each program on a physical CD.

The business world should rejoice, because the cloud-based Office 365 offers many advantages compared to old Office products. The most obvious benefit is, of course, how much more affordable it is. But Office 365 also flies in the face of the old "you get what you pay for" mentality, providing better service and more features than what was available before.
How much does it cost?

We already told you that Office 365 is cheap, but cheap is a vague, relative term. Let’s get down to exactly how much Office 365 will cost your business:

- **Business Essentials**: $5/user/month for an annual commitment, $6/user/month for month-to-month
- **Business**: $8.25/user/month for an annual commitment, $10/user/month for month-to-month
- **Business Premium**: $12.50/user/month for an annual commitment, $15/user/month for month-to-month

What’s the difference between these 3 options? Well, let’s focus first on the similarities. Each of these 3 packages provides the online versions of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint and 1 TB of remote storage space. That’s about as far as the features of the cheapest option, Business Essentials, goes (“Essentials” appears to be a euphemism for “Bare Bones” in this case).

For a few extra dollars a month, you can upgrade to Business. This package includes the full versions of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, which contain more features than the online versions of those programs provided by Business Essentials. Another difference from Business Essentials is that this suite also contains Outlook, Publisher, and OneNote.

The most feature-packed option, Business Premium, has everything that Business has, plus an email account with 50 GB of space, unlimited online HD video conferencing, and access to a corporate social network.

In addition to the Office 365 Business products, Microsoft also offers some Office 365 products for bigger business under the Enterprise label:

- **Enterprise E1**: $8/user/month, for an annual commitment
- **ProPlus**: $12/user/month, for an annual commitment
- **Enterprise E3**: $20/user/month, for an annual commitment

What separate the Enterprise products from the Business products? Well, for one thing, you can’t sign up on a month-to-month basis... it’s an annual contract or nothing.

Enterprise E1 is so cheap because, like Business Essentials, you only get the online version to Office apps, not the full version. What Enterprise E1 has that Business Essentials doesn’t are a few extra tweaks that make it more attractive to larger business, like a corporate video portal for adding and sharing videos across a company.

ProPlus and Enterprise E3 do have the full version of all the Office apps. ProPlus also includes the features Group Policy, Telemetry, and Shared Computer Activation. Enterprise E3 expands on that with guaranteed compliance and legal protections using the Rights Management and Data Loss Prevention features.
Is it secure?

A lot of users are understandably a little leery about trusting all their sensitive data to something they don’t understand. Computers in general are enough to confuse and frighten those who aren’t exactly tech-oriented... and something as new and trendy as the cloud is downright intimidating. It’s a natural question for businesses to ask: Am I actually secure on the cloud?

First of all, it’s a little illogical to worry about cloud storage. If your business uses the internet (we believe it’s safe to assume in 2015 you do indeed use the internet), then you’re already vulnerable to pretty much all the threats that are associated with the cloud.

Also, Office 365 takes many measures to keep your systems running and your data secure. Microsoft uses state-of-the-art firewalls and encryption to keep potential hackers at bay. They also use 3 different datacenters, so if there is a disaster at one datacenter, one of the other 2 will take over the lost datacenter’s responsibilities within an hour.

Most threats are web-born, but there is also the possibility of one of your devices being physically stolen. If this happens, don’t worry. Office 365 requires multifactor authentication every time you sign in with a new device, meaning that even if you use the right password you’ll also have to enter a code that Microsoft sends to the cell phone number they have on file for your account. And if someone is able to steal both your laptop and your phone, you also have the ability to wipe the data on your devices remotely.
What makes Office 365 better than similar SaaS solutions?

Office 365 isn't the only remote-access SaaS solution on the market. It's got some high-powered competition in Google Apps, and it's only a matter of time before Apple hits the cloud-based product suite market as well. But until Apple does enter the fray, the 2 most viable options are Office 365 and Google Apps. So, what makes Office 365 better than Google Apps?

More Options:
As you saw in the pricing section of this sheet, there are many different varieties of Office 365 to choose from, so you can find the perfect balance of price and capabilities to fit your needs. In fact, we only listed 6 options, Google only offer 2 options: Google Apps for Business and Google Apps for Business with Vault.

Easier HIPAA Compliance:
If you work in the healthcare industry, you shouldn't touch Google Apps with a 10-foot pole. The vast majority of hospitals and smaller healthcare practices that have used both Google Apps and Office 365 find that Office 365 makes it much easier to meet all the HIPAA security and compliance standards required for handling patient data.

A Better Collective Experience:
Both Google and Microsoft engage in stat-bragging to attract prospective customers. They gloat about who has biggest inboxes, who has the most apps, which can produce the trendiest new feature. But as easy as these things are to boast about when pitching a product, they're not what really makes the best products.

No, what matters most is: Who offers the best collective experience? The answer to that question is a subjective one, but many people, from casual private users through tech-obsessives to no-nonsense business professionals, prefer the Office 365 experience as a whole to what Google has to offer. Maybe you will too.