

Bricocenter's Own Improvement Project

Staying in touch with customers and employees using Google Apps for Work

Posted by **Riccardo Zanni**, Chief Technology Officer, Bricocenter

Google for Work

Editor's note

Riccardo Zann is the Chief Technology Officer of Bricocenter, a chain of 77 home improvement stores in Italy with headquarters in Milan. He shares here how Bricocenter uses Google Apps for Work to help employees share useful information with colleagues and stay in touch with customers in the store and on the road.



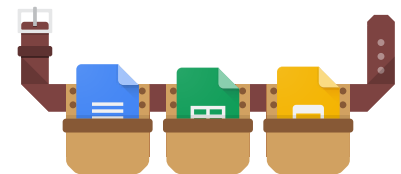
Think about those flashes of inspiration you have when you're in the middle of a DIY project — like finding the perfect bathroom sink, or a lounge chair for the terrace. We want Bricocenter to be the first place people think of to make that inspiration a reality. Our sales teams work hard to connect to people in their communities and help with their DIY projects, and we're building and strengthening these customer relationships even more with Google Apps for Work.

Before we started using Google Apps, our **1,400** employees were largely disconnected from customers and from each other. We used Microsoft Office 365 for email, but the aging PCs in our stores ran the applications very slowly — and in some cases, didn't

allow employees to use email at all. Each store has as many as 10 people sharing three PCs. Slow software forced sales people to take more time to read and answer email, which meant less time spent on the sales floor helping customers. Also, not every employee had a Microsoft 365 email address or access to productivity apps, since we would have had to buy too many costly licenses.

Because Office 365 couldn't be accessed from a web-based browser, we were told that the only solution was to upgrade or replace all of the PCs across our stores for the software to work the way we needed. Even worse, we'd face several days of email downtime during the changeover. Needless to say, this plan didn't make sense for our budget or work environment.

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We think technology should follow the way we work – not vice versa. That’s why we chose Google Apps for Work, and partnered with Google Apps Reseller, Revevol, to help us through a seamless migration process to ensure our teams could work the way they wanted.

Google Apps for Work didn’t require hardware upgrades, and functioned well with our existing PCs because it can be accessed from any modern browser. Every employee received a Gmail address without the need to purchase extra licenses or create time-consuming group profiles, as we had to do with Microsoft Office 365.

Our choice of Google Apps dovetailed perfectly with our pilot plan to outfit **500** sales people with smartphones, so they could stay connected to colleagues and customers outside of the stores. Now they can access email and company documents on their phones, and stay in touch with store managers, colleagues and customers.

Faster, wider access to email is only part of our Google Apps story. People are using Google Drive to store documents and presentations that would have been impossible to collaboratively create and share with Microsoft 365. Now that all employees have Gmail addresses, everyone can use Google Apps to create presentations and share them with all of their coworkers.

Anyone at Bricocenter, even people who don’t know any HTML code, can spin up a site in just a few clicks with Google Sites. For example, our finance department created their own internal site to share helpful content – embedded easily in the site from Google Slides – about best practices for accounting.

Google Apps helps us to get more work done faster. I recently needed to ask store managers about the performance of the GSM mobile networks in their stores. Instead of sending out emails, which might have taken several days to get responses, I created a survey using Google Forms, and I sent a link to each store manager using Google Hangouts’ chat feature – more attention-getting than email. I collected all the feedback I needed in just one day, thanks to the simplicity of creating the questionnaire (for me) and submitting suggestions (for them).

We often talk about the importance of getting closer to our customers as a core company value. Google Apps shrink the distance between store employees and customers, between employees and managers, and between work and home life so those dream DIY projects can become a reality.

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