

PRODUCT REVIEW / ANALYSE DE PRODUITS

Evernote

Product Information: <https://www.evernote.com/>

Purpose: Cloud note management and web clipper (a tool for saving web content to view later)

Price: Basic account, free; premium subscription, \$5 per month or \$45 per year (USD)

Compatibility: Windows, Mac, iPhone–iPad, Android, BlackBerry, Windows phone

Product description

Evernote is one of the top tools for creating and organizing notes online. Notes are spaces where you can write text or upload an image or audio for future reference. Notes are saved and synchronized to your account, so you can view and edit them anywhere you can connect to the internet.

You can use Evernote to manage all of your life's notes such as grocery lists, to-do lists, wish lists, recipes, photos, and documents. Some people use it exclusively for work purposes to organize projects or to save pdfs and different webpages for research. I tested it for both work and personal uses. For work use, I made separate notes with details and links for each ongoing project. For personal notes, I saved recipes, products I want to buy, and gardening notes. I experimented with both creating notes from scratch and using the web clipper to save and edit pages from the web.

Evernote is a “freemium” service, with basic free (advertisement supported) accounts and an ongoing fee for premium accounts with extra features and no advertisements. It is available on all major platforms including desktop, web, and app versions, and I tested each.

Evernote has been available for a few years and has changed significantly since its initial release. I tried it a couple of years ago but found the interface unintuitive, and I was keen to give it another go.

Subscription options

You only need an email address to sign up for a free account. Premium accounts require a monthly or yearly fee but will enable:

- extra storage space (up to 100 MB for each note, 1 GB uploads per month),
- the ability to invite other people to edit your notes,
- optical character recognition (OCR) to make text in pdf files searchable,
- the ability to view and edit notes without an internet connection,
- the ability to view old versions of notes, and

- the search feature will include attached Microsoft Office documents.

I tested the free account for this review.

Features

Storage and syncing

Basic accounts allow up to 25 MB per note (about the size of five mp3s), and you can upload up to 60 MB a month. It autosaves notes as you edit them (you can turn this off if you prefer). Uploading a note adds it to your account, and you can then organize it.

Organization and search

Notes can be organized by tags, subtags, or geolocation and arranged into folders (which can further be arranged into stacks—basically another kind of folder). You can search within your saved notes by keywords, geolocation, or tag. Images you upload will be scanned with OCR to make the words searchable (OCR on pdf files requires a premium account).

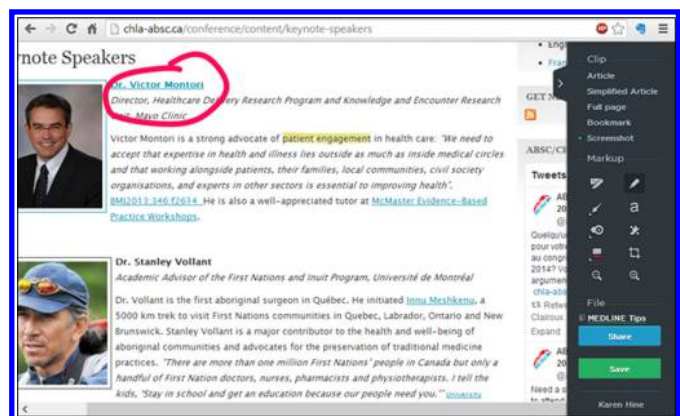
Web clipper

One of the best features of Evernote is the free add-on browser extension called Evernote Web Clipper (works with Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Safari, and Internet Explorer). Once installed, you can select a web page (or part of a web page) to save as a note with just a couple of clicks, and you can even add your own markup. This makes it a convenient tool for saving things to read later (Figure 1).

Text editing

The text editor is robust and you can select most popular rich text features. The app version is the most limited, and it only allows bold, italic, strikethrough, and bullets and

Fig. 1. Web clipper.



numbering. The web version gives you a few extra options such as different font styles, colors, and sizes. The desktop version offers even more such as the ability to create tables.

Audio

Using the app and a device with a microphone, you can either record audio notes to add as an attached file or have the app transcribe spoken audio using speech-to-text. You can record for over two hours (long enough for many meetings). You can also upload saved audio files such as songs.

Images

You can easily attach images to notes from your desktop or the web. Using the app you can snap and upload pictures from your mobile device's camera and annotate them.

Other files

You may attach Microsoft Word documents and other files to notes, but you can't edit them without a compatible program.

Sharing

You can create a link to a note to share with people you choose. Anyone with the link will be able to view the note (they don't need an account). Only premium accounts will enable shared notes to be edited (this might be useful for collaborating on projects between colleagues or family members).

Integration with other services

It's easy to send content from other apps and websites to Evernote. For example, you can use your email account or Twitter to send notes to your Evernote. Or you can set up your Evernote so that it archives certain tweets for you. It integrates with other Evernote apps such as Hello (contact manager) and third party apps such as Penultimate (for taking notes by handwriting).

Reminders

You can elect to receive reminders or simple to-do lists about particular notes via app or email.

Security

In addition to the password, you can enable two-step verification (receive codes to log in by SMS or app). You can also view a history of when your account was accessed over the past 30 days.

Comparison with similar products

Springpad

Springpad offers a similar cloud note management tool with a web clipper and app. This tool is supported by advertising only (no premium accounts), so users cannot upgrade for extra features. It works mostly like Evernote and has the same note size limit, but it offers a more image-oriented interface. However, it lacks Evernote's advanced web clipper, OCR, editing features, and integration with other apps. Its main benefit is that it allows free (limited) collaboration on shared notes, and you can select certain notes to be public (so other people can discover them by searching or browsing and reshare). However, in terms of

picture or link-sharing communities, I prefer to use Pinterest or Tumblr for their larger size and usability.

Microsoft OneNote

Evernote's other's top competitor. OneNote's web and app versions are free, but the desktop version must be bought (either alone or it comes with Microsoft Office suite bundles, and there is also a 30-day free trial). You can download a web clipper for Internet Explorer only. Third-party extensions have been created for both Firefox and Chrome, but unfortunately these don't appear to be fully reliable. It integrates well with Microsoft products such as Office files, Outlook, and SkyDrive. Like Evernote, it does OCR. It also allows free real-time collaboration. The app is a bit more limited than Evernote in terms of its ability to organize notes, you can't store audio, and you must pay extra for storing more than 500 notes. This is a decent tool whose biggest limitations are the weak app and limited compatibility with different platforms and services.

Catch Notes

A decent freemium tool with a web version, web clipper, and app. Catch Notes boasts inline tagging for advanced note organization. Like Springpad, it also offers free PIN protection and (limited) collaboration, but not much else in the way of unique features. It limits you to plain text, and lacks Evernote's OCR and Springpad's social tools. The storage plans are expensive, and it does not mesh with as many apps and platforms as Evernote.

Google Drive

A freemium file creation and cloud storage tool with a different focus. It has a high storage limit of 5 GB and no limit per document or per month. The web interface boasts even more text editing options than Evernote's desktop version (footnotes, highlighting, etc.), and it will let you create tables, unlike Evernote's web version. It is also the only tool profiled here that will let you create and edit spreadsheets, even via the app. It also allows free real-time collaboration and OCR. Unfortunately, it lacks a web clipper and the ability to tag notes.

Google Keep

Newcomer Google Keep is very basic in its capabilities and is not currently compatible with many apps. From the web version you can upload notes and images but not audio, and storage space is shared with your drive. You can upload audio from the app and have it transcribe the words. Again, there is no web clipper and no tagging.

Figure 2 offers a comparison of the various tools, and Figure 3 outlines the various costs of the tools.

Strengths of Evernote

- Excellent web clipper
- Unlimited overall storage
- Some advanced text editing features
- Can share notes and web clips with select users
- OCR in images (some free; pdf files require Premium version)
- Advanced options for organizing and searching notes
- Reminders

Fig. 2. Compatibility and modes of access.

Web Version	Web Clipper	Mobile App	Desktop App
Evernote	Chrome Firefox Safari Internet Explorer	Apple/iOS Android BlackBerry Windows Phone	Windows Mac No
Springpad	Chrome Firefox Safari Internet Explorer	Apple/iOS Android (3rd party BlackBerry) No (mobile web version)	No
Microsoft OneNote	(3 rd party Chrome) (3 rd party Firefox) No Safari Internet Explorer	Apple Android (3rd party BlackBerry Playbook) Windows Phone	Windows No No
Catch Notes	Chrome Firefox No Safari Internet Explorer	Apple/iOS Android (3rd party BlackBerry) No	No
Google Drive	No	Apple/iOS Android No No	Windows Mac No
Google Keep	No	No Android No No	No

Fig. 3. Prices and storage (prices shown in USD).

Web Version	Limits on Free Accounts	Premium Prices & Storage
Evernote	Total: No /Note: 25 MB /Month: 60 MB	Amount Month Year 1 GB/month \$5 \$45 100 MB max file size
Springpad	Total: No /Note: 25 MB /Month: No	No
Microsoft OneNote	Total: 7 GB (SkyDrive) /Note: 2 GB /Month: No 30 day free trial of desktop version App: 500 notes	Amount Month Year 27 GB total No \$10 57 GB total No \$25 107 GB total No \$50 Stores in SkyDrive Desktop: \$69.99 as a standalone program, or with Office 365, \$9.99/month or \$99.99/year App: \$4.99 allows more storage (\$14.99 for an iPad)
Catch Notes	Total: 250 MB /Note: 20 MB /Month: 70 MB 3 spaces/notebooks	Amount Month Year 1 GB/month \$5 \$45 50 spaces/notebooks 5 GB/month \$16 \$145 10 GB max file size 200 spaces/notebooks
Google Drive	Total: 15 GB (30 GB for enterprise Google Apps users) /Note: 2 MB (documents) 20 MB (spreadsheets) 50 MB (presentations) 10 GB (other files) /Month: No	Amount Month Year 25 GB total \$2.50 \$30 100 GB total \$5 \$60 200 GB total \$10 \$120 400 GB total \$20 \$240 1 TB total \$50 \$600 2 TB total \$100 \$1200 4 TB total \$200 \$2400 8 TB total \$400 \$4800 16 TB total \$800 \$9600 Storage space shared with Gmail, Google Keep and Google+ Photos
Google Keep	Total: 15 GB /Note: No /Month: No	Same as Google Drive

- Desktop version has keyboard shortcuts to speed up work
- Excellent integration with third party apps

- Compatible with many platforms
- Advertisements are unobtrusive
- Two-step verification security for accounts

Weaknesses of Evernote

- Monthly data upload limit and file size limit might be too low for some purposes, even with the premium account
- No free collaboration
- No public note sharing or discovery
- Occasional glitches such as note previews not reflecting correct content
- Sometimes text is sluggish to edit

Conclusion

If you just need cloud file storage, skip Evernote—you'll get more space for less money with Microsoft OneNote (SkyDrive). Google Drive is slightly more expensive but it allows bigger files and lets you buy more storage. Amazon Cloud Drive is somewhere in between. Although Evernote has unlimited total storage unlike these alternatives, even the premium accounts have a monthly limit for how much you can upload.

If all you need is a place to create detailed documents on the web, you may prefer Google Drive's editing features. Unlike Evernote, it will also let you create spreadsheets and slideshow presentations and not just attach them. Also use Google Drive (or Box) if you're keen on free real-time collaboration. If you want to share with a broad public audience, Pinterest is great for short notes and links.

However, when it comes to creating, collecting, and organizing a variety of content in one place, Evernote is king. This feature-rich product is further enhanced by its compatibility with many third party apps. I use Evernote for most of my work and personal notes, and Pinterest just for ones I want to share publicly, such as recipes. I'm happy with this arrangement—but given how quickly these services can change in a couple of years, I'll be keeping an eye on the alternatives.

Karen Hine

*Reference, Health Sciences Library
London Health Sciences Centre – Victoria Hospital Site
800 Commissioners Rd. E.,
London, ON N6A 5W9
E-mail: kjhine@gmail.com*