

When it comes to cloud storage, Dropbox is one of the juggernauts of the field. Since its official release in 2008, it has been a staple of the cloud storage world, boasting a range of features that offer solutions for businesses and individuals alike. Since the release of Dropbox, many similar services have arisen on the coattails of their success. Let's take a look at some of the reasons that Dropbox is still a household name in the cloud storage world -- and the areas that the competition gives them a run for their money!

Fundamentally, Dropbox offers a streamlined service with an uncluttered, easy to use dash that makes accessing and sorting through your files simple and quick. They achieve this by breaking up their services into multiple tiers, allowing for the features the standard user may find bog down their experience for the people who are really looking for that extra tool.

Regardless of tier, the uploading and sharing process remains consistent. It's as easy as clicking "upload file" and selecting the file you want to store on the site. From there you can organize your files into folders and easily share them with friends, family, and coworkers by clicking the "share" button and entering their email address

The tiers include a variety of different features that augment the base system as well as offering extra storage. The plans are subscription-based, billed either monthly or annually, with a discounted offered for annual billing. A free trial is offered for the majority of these services so you can get a feel for their pros and cons before committing, which is valuable, as these plans don't come cheap!

The first tier that Dropbox offers is a free service, which provides the user with 2GB of storage space. One thing Dropbox excels at is making sure accessing your files is easy, because once they're uploaded, you can access them on your computer via a desktop app, online by accessing your account or fully optimized on your phone via the Dropbox app.

For users who don't want to upgrade to a paid plan, Dropbox also offers a referral system, whereby getting a friend to sign up, you gain access to a further 500MB, up to a total gain of 16GB.

The free tier also gives the user access to the Dropbox Paper service. Similar to Google Docs, this service attempts to fulfill the need for in house word processing. While it offers a sleek interface with the option for dark mode and easy multimedia integration, the service lags behind its competition in processing power and simple customization options, such as easy access to font choices or document themes. In this area, Google Docs is still your best bet.

For users who require a more robust cloud storage option, and who do not want to go through the hassle of badgering their friends to sign up, Dropbox offers paid services that are broken up into two main categories, which are then further divided into subcategories.

The first subcategory is marketed "For Individuals," and is divided into "Plus" and "Professional." These services will afford you 2TB and 3TB of storage space respectively. In addition, each offer comes with additional benefits, including two-factor authentication and priority email support.

Comparatively, Google Drive offers many of these services free of charge, and also offer extra storage room at lower rates. If you're looking to store large volumes of personal information or files pertaining to a small business, it would be best and likely cheaper to look elsewhere for cloud storage.

With that said, the second main category “For Teams” does offer more value than its counterpart. For businesses or teams that require a service that will allow them to collaborate and manage their workflow, the “Standard” and “Advanced” plans offer 5TB and unlimited storage respectively. In addition, these plans unlock a suite of team management and advanced support options.

The Team Management features include an admin console, which allows managers to monitor their team’s productivity and connected devices. This helps streamline team output by allowing managers to observe and take action on delays in real-time.

The “Advanced” tier specifically offers access to many useful features including tiered admin roles and the ability to sign in to your team’s Dropbox accounts’ directly.

The direct competitor of this service is Microsoft OneDrive, which has the advantage of the full integration of the Microsoft Office Suite. The powerful tools Dropbox offers for team management are valuable, but once again it comes at a greater cost than its competitors.

Dropbox boasts 256-bit AES and SSL/TLS encryption on data transfers, meaning you can transfer your data with the reassurance that it won’t be intercepted. Dropbox has an advantage over Google in this respect, as Google only guarantees TLS encryption on transfers to other Google accounts.

While this encryption is certainly welcome, it is also important to acknowledge that Dropbox is not immune to data breaches and its privacy policy leaves much to be desired.

An incident in 2016 involved the usernames and passwords of 68 million Dropbox users being leaked due to a breach in a Dropbox employee’s account stemming from a known issue in 2012.

It is also noteworthy that former NSA contractor and whistleblower Edward Snowden condemned Dropbox’s privacy policy, stating that it allowed Dropbox to decrypt its users’ information if a government agency where to put pressure on them to do so. Snowden recommended SpiderOak in place of Dropbox for its superior privacy policy.

In summary, Dropbox is a strong all-round contender but falls short of one competitor or another in a variety of areas. Its word processing capabilities leave much to be desired, despite being rolled out for three years and its privacy policy is lackluster. As a free service, it does well but fails to compete with the prices offered by its contemporaries.

While Dropbox doesn’t seem to be losing popularity any time soon, and the user experience is always pleasant, it is important to acknowledge that despite its advantage of being one of the first on the scene, it has fallen behind and relies on its name value as the main draw for new customers.