

OFFICE '10 TOUTS PRO

Microsoft's newest version of the popular Office suite brings stability, new features and enhancements to collaboration.



Few products rival Office for sheer impact on the day-to-day operations of most businesses. It's not only a conduit for documents that make up a big part of a company's workday, but also the primary communication mechanism tapped by workers.

Fortunately, Microsoft's flagship Office desktop suite upgrade offers a number of meaningful enhancements to core Office capabilities proven highly productive over the years. In addition, it offers new capabilities by taking Office apps beyond the

immediately obvious changes on opening any of the Office applications in 2010. The most visible change is that the Ribbon interface, introduced in 2007, has been extended to the rest of the suite, including Outlook and OneNote.

The now-familiar Ribbon should make it easy for Office 2007 users to get up to speed right away. Office 2003 users, however, will face a learning curve when adapting to the Ribbon bar.

What's New in Office 2010?

According to the experts, Microsoft Office 2010 offers a number of significant improvements. These include extended file compatibility, user interface updates and a refined user experience. Still,

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desktop and onto the web.

With its emphasis on collaboration tools as well as web-readiness, it's likely the latest iteration of Office will draw IT's critical attention and acclaim. This is as companies work to determine if the suite aligns with their businesses' technology sweet spot.

Proven Effectiveness

Before a company takes on the deployment and retraining costs involved in an upgrade, it naturally wants to know how the new suite will make its workers more productive — and whether the latest version will affect support demands on the IT staff.

For one thing, Office 2010 is technically solid. "Even in beta-testing, it was a very efficient application," says Tim Hickernell, lead research analyst at Info-Tech Research Group.

"We didn't find bad memory leaks or any type of resource issues," Hickernell adds. Hickernell has been evaluating the product for business use since the beta's release last November. "In fact, I never could get the application to crash. It's very, very stable."

Users of Office 2007 won't find many

this latest version of the software could be considered an advancement of an already very popular productivity suite.

"Windows 2010 is an evolutionary upgrade," Hickernell says. "It's not a revolutionary one." Because Microsoft programmers already significantly rewrote code for the 2007 release, much of 2010 consists of fine-tuning and improving on the big steps forward made in 2007.

Nevertheless, there are many brand-new features that distinguish Office 2010 from its predecessors, especially for business users. The extension of the Ribbon interface to the whole suite simplifies the process of working with documents, whether they're spreadsheets, word-processing documents, e-mail messages or presentations.

In addition, the introduction of a so-called Backstage area in each program centralizes file operations such as saving, printing and sharing. Finally, the integration of online services significantly improves the suite's collaboration capabilities.

Ribbon

The Ribbon bar in Office 2007 replaced the traditional menus in Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint (and some parts of Outlook) with context-dependent, process-oriented "ribbons." Each contains buttons for a set of related tasks.

For instance, a Review ribbon in Word gives easy access to functions such as spelling and grammar, tracking and accepting changes, and adding comments — all with one click.

Many functions, such as applying styles or changing fonts, feature live previews so a user can see how an option will affect

What's in Office 2010?

Office comprises a huge bundle of software, each a major program in its own right. Here's a listing of the applications in the three versions — Standard, Professional and Professional Plus — or that can be bought to run within Office and are the most likely to be deployed in a business environment:

- **Access:** Database management program used to manage various forms of information and generate reports (Pro and Pro Plus)
- **Excel:** Spreadsheet creation and analysis (Standard, Pro and Pro Plus)
- **InfoPath:** A form creator used to generate forms to be served up through SharePoint (Pro Plus only)
- **OneNote:** Note-taking program (Standard, Pro and Pro Plus)
- **Outlook:** Combines e-mail, calendaring, task management and contact management (Standard, Pro and Pro Plus)
- **PowerPoint:** Presentation creation and display (Standard, Pro and Pro Plus)
- **Publisher:** Entry-level desktop publishing program, used for creating newsletters, fliers and other simple documents (Standard, Pro and Pro Plus)
- **Office Communicator:** An instant-messaging client designed specifically for corporate communications (Pro Plus only)
- **SharePoint Workspace:** Formerly known as Groove, SharePoint Workspace client allows the creation of collaborative workspaces to which others can be invited (Pro Plus only)
- **SharePoint Designer:** A WYSIWYG webpage editor used to create SharePoint sites; can only be used in conjunction with SharePoint (not included with Office, but as a free download from Microsoft)
- **Word:** Document creation and editing (Standard, Pro and Pro Plus)
- **Visio:** Diagramming software (Sold separately)
- **Project:** Project management (Sold separately)

the appearance of a document simply by hovering over the relevant button in the Ribbon.

Office 2010 replaces the remaining drop-down menus in the rest of the Office suite with ribbons. Therefore, the interface is uniform regardless of the application in use.

Because the Ribbon feature is designed to reveal Office functions formerly hidden two, three or more levels deep in drop-down menus, having the same menu not only eases confusion when moving between applications but also should make it easier for users to find the tools that they need.

Backstage

The Backstage view is a new feature introduced across the suite. Found under the File tab on the right end of the Ribbon bar, the Backstage view is a separate area for working with files (as opposed to their contents).

"The Backstage makes all those things you have to do with files easier to do," says Michael Cherry, vice president of research at Directions on Microsoft. "It makes a lot of general management tasks around files much easier."

Because the Backstage view uses the full screen, a user can easily move between functions that would have required opening new windows in older versions.

For example, a user can modify print options such as page layout, paper size and pages per side and then view a live page preview directly in the Backstage screen. This makes it far easier to set print options before sending a job to the printer.

Online Integration

One of the biggest changes found in Microsoft Office 2010 is the integration of online access via the desktop on Windows Live — an online site for instant messaging, e-mail and document storage.

Staffers can use the online capabilities for creating a website or storing and sharing documents online. For example, users can save files to SkyDrive on Windows Live where they can share, view and edit them using web versions of core Office applications (Word, Excel and PowerPoint).

Office 2010's Backstage view helps users manage the variety of new options for moving documents online. The feature facilitates a process that would have been kludgy using traditional drop-down menus.

Other New Features

While many Microsoft 2010 features apply across the suite, some are application specific. In fact, almost every application in Office 2010 has at least one or two impressive new features to help boost worker productivity.

Some of them are tiny refinements. These include Word's new Paste button which gives options for several ways to handle formatting, allowing text to be pasted from another program (with its original formatting, with the new document's formatting or without formatting at all).

Other changes are grand in scale, especially within Excel, Outlook and PowerPoint.

Excel

Office's spreadsheet application adds two ways to help visualize data: Sparklines and Slicers. A Sparkline sums up data across a selection of cells. "It's a tiny chart that gives users a trend in a glance," says Albert Chew, Microsoft's senior product manager for Excel.

For instance, if a user has 12 columns listing sales data per region for each of the last 12 months, he can insert a Sparkline at the end of each line that will graph the data in each row. This allows for quickly acknowledging quarterly sales trends for each region.

For more complicated data, Excel users have long relied on pivot tables to summarize information and create different views. The new Slicers let users quickly select rows or columns of data and embed a set of buttons into the spreadsheet from which to drill down into the data.

For example, for the simple sales data mentioned above, a Slicer could let the user select a specific month or several months. This would allow for instantly rearranging the table to show only the selected number of months.

In more complex situations with dozens or even hundreds of variables — such as a spreadsheet showing sales by state and country, product SKUs, sales team members and sales channels — Slicers create quick tabs so that users can snare exactly the data they need on the fly.

Outlook

Outlook introduces several new ways to manage e-mail, including Quick Steps, user-generated rules that can be applied as a user works from the Ribbon bar. Another is Show as Conversation, which can thread e-mail exchanges by collapsing related messages into a group that can be viewed together.

Other new functions take advantage of the relationship between Outlook and Exchange. Exchange Mail Tips can let a user know when a coworker she's about to e-mail is out of the office or away from his desk. This helps to minimize mistakes and save time that might otherwise be wasted. Another new feature in Exchange allows corporate voicemail messages to be transcribed and routed to users' inboxes.

Perhaps the biggest advance in Outlook is integration of social networking information. This combines in one view the internal information about a contact, such as SharePoint activity, with information from social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Windows Live.

PowerPoint

Office's presentation editor gets two major enhancements in 2010. The first supports the ability to broadcast a presentation live, using either Windows Live or SharePoint to stream presentations to remote viewers over the web.

Another exciting feature in PowerPoint: the ability to easily insert video and images and perform fairly advanced editing, such as automatically removing image backgrounds or trimming footage. Because video-laden presentations can quickly grow past manageable sizes, Backstage also includes simple and fast tools for reducing presentation size so that users will be able to send them via e-mail.

On to the Upgrade

Hickernell at Info-Tech recommends that most companies start looking at Office 2010 now. That is unless they've recently upgraded to 2007 and have yet to reach their investment return on training and license outlay.

"The biggest thing we based our recommendations on weren't features," Hickernell adds. "If you're at 2003 or below, you really do need to upgrade. If you're on subscription licensing, you already own it, so do it."

Suggestions from Microsoft's Cherry agree, warning that IT departments should dispense with any wait-and-see approach. "As you get further on, the [learning and training] gap gets bigger and bigger, and when it gets too big, the upgrade becomes really hard and really expensive," he says. ♦

SharePoint 2010 Intro

Along with Office 2010, Microsoft introduced SharePoint 2010 earlier this year. Dubbed by the firm as the business collaboration platform for the enterprise and web, Microsoft SharePoint 2010 is said to deliver substantial benefits over its predecessor.

Most important, the enhanced capabilities of SharePoint 2010 and Office 2010 work together to help a company quickly respond to changing business needs. While the Microsoft SharePoint and Office suites have shared integration qualities over the years, these capabilities are said to be enhanced with the new versions of each.

Capitalizing on the powerful combination of SharePoint 2010 and Office 2010 will enhance one-on-one as well as group collaboration. Teams will also be able to communicate effectively, stay in touch and work together on shared content.

In both the self-hosted and Windows Live versions, SharePoint and Office 2010 users can work on a file simultaneously. This makes collaboration during a teleconference or instant messaging session much simpler than in earlier Office versions.

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