

Microsoft Office 2010: The ideal upgrade for small businesses



Microsoft® Office 2010 is the latest version of Microsoft's best-selling business productivity suite; and sure, it's full of exciting new features and functions. But is it a worth-while upgrade if you already have an older version of Office? If competitiveness, business agility and finding new margin in tough economic times are near the top of your list of priorities, the answer is definitely 'Yes'.

Business in the current economic climate is nothing short of Darwinian: adapt, survive and thrive; or wither on the vine. Key to adapting to – and better exploiting – a dynamic business environment is technology designed to help, not hinder. Indeed, smaller companies and one-man-bands have perhaps the most to gain from the IT advantage:

- The fewer staff you have, the more value should be placed on your time. In other words, saving time on admin jobs like invoicing, writing out quotes etc. is money in the bank.
- IT is comparatively inexpensive today – computers and software are the ideal low-cost way to unlock time savings.

That's why Microsoft has invested three and a half years of engineering time into creating the Office 2010 that offers tailored help to small businesses.

Office 2010 has a rich heritage – it is the world's most popular office productivity software. But if you have an older version, you need to know that much has changed. "The business world has seen some major changes over the last decade, including many since the last release of Office in 2007," says Chris Adams, Microsoft Office Client Product Manager. "There's been the huge rise in connectivity that means we are in contact with the office, customers and partners far more than when we were just tied to a desktop PC. Another huge change has been the contraction in time – we simply no longer have a week to respond fully to a customer request; they expect a response within hours."

To meet those customer demands in the same timeframe as larger and better-resourced competitors, small businesses need to be agile and responsive. Adams argues that up-to-date technology maximises your time and efficiency by:

- Making you as connected as possible with the people you know, from staff to partners and customers
- Enabling you to work where and when you need
- Making communications, documents and presentations impressive and easy to produce first time

Indeed, the full Office suite now includes everything the small business owner could need:

Microsoft Word:
word processing and document creation

Microsoft Excel®:
spreadsheets and financial management

Microsoft Outlook®:
e-mail, calendar, to-do lists

Microsoft PowerPoint®:
engaging presentations

Microsoft OneNote®:
Capture, store and share anything

Product evolution...

Every release has great new functions, of course – some of which, cynics say, don't ever get used or which don't really add much value to each user's experience. Adams calls this the '10% myth'. "We often hear that only 10% of Word, say, is ever used. Well, firstly, the 10% you use is bound to be different from the 10% I use or your staff use. But more importantly, we collect, via the Microsoft Office Customer Experience programme, terabytes of data and user feedback per day – which has shown us what functions people are actually using, and what they are struggling with."

Take, for example, that set of functions we all use numerous times a day – the ‘cut-copy-paste’ cycle. Microsoft developers noted that the next most common command in Word after that trio is ‘Undo’. That taught the team that users typically spend longer than they expected creating documents. Therefore, just as Office 2007 included live previews of font and style changes, Office 2010 continues the enhancement of preview functionality so that users can now check that an edit is correct before committing to it.

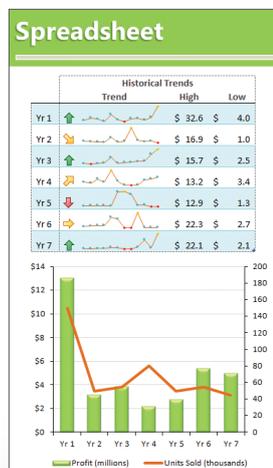


If this sounds trivial, consider the hours that would be saved once each unnecessary mouse-click is stacked up. Printing in Office 2010, for example, has been improved by the inclusion of an **automatic Print Preview by default**. “Every release is a mix of revolution and evolution and 2010 is no different,” says Adams. “We have 500 million users worldwide now and Word and PowerPoint were 25 years old last year – but they are still number one in their markets and still fantastically relevant and useful.”

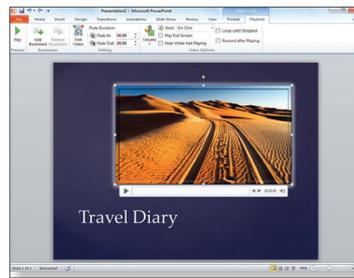
...To Revolution

Office 2010 is also all about new, innovative ways of working with documents, data and presentations, designed to make the business user get the most out of their time.

For example, Office 2010 is designed to allow users to work across the devices they use each day: the PC, the phone, and the browser. “Users need a seamless experience, working with documents and spreadsheets wherever they happen to physically be. For example, we treat the document as the central factor here, not the access method to it, and will preserve its richness whatever device is being used”, says Adams.



Then there is a raft of improvements, time-savers and new features designed to make Office more productive for each user than ever before. With Excel, look for improvements to conditional formatting and charting functionality, with, for example, the new **Sparklines feature** which puts visually appealing charts into individual cells.



In **PowerPoint**, you can now embed and **edit full video** from within a presentation.

The entire Office suite also now allows you to connect your desktop automatically and easily

with your online life. Word, for example, includes support for blogging, Web-site content, e-mail newsletters and social networking services. Office 2010 includes native support for online storage: you can easily save your documents to Windows Live™ SkyDrive™ directly from the popular Office 2010 applications. Not only does this provide 25GB of free online storage keeping your documents safe, but also supports anywhere access to your documents with the new Office Web Apps. Plus, as your business grows, Office 2010 integrates perfectly with software-as-a-service hosted solutions like Microsoft Online Services. Says Adams, “For the small business, Microsoft Online Services are all about making the management and payment of IT as simple and economical as possible, and Office 2010 makes it really easy to maximise the benefits for your end users.” Whatever you spend on desktop software, you can be sure that they will fully integrate with the emerging range of ‘Cloud’ or hosted products.

Money talk

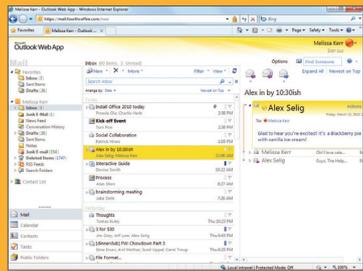
Cost-conscious MDs can’t be blamed for holding off on IT purchases when every penny counts (and in small businesses, every penny always counts)! But just because software isn’t a physical asset doesn’t mean it’s not worth upgrading.

Adams says he completely understands the cautious financial position, but counters that Microsoft has structured the Office 2010 offering (including the new Home and Business suite) to give customers a wide set of options for deploying and paying for Office 2010: “We have not just both evolved the product and added in new functionality to radically improve the power to collaborate, share and understand information and streamline your day, Office 2010 is also available in packages that suit your budget, business size and current operational needs.”

Just a few of the key features in the new Office 2010

Co-Authoring

Allows multiple people to share and update a document simultaneously. Each person on a team can see who is working on the document online and even start a conversation with that person in real time. Plus, you can see the section your colleagues are working on to make the experience easy. It's collaborative working direct from the software.



Conversation View

Improves the tracking and managing of related e-mails while saving valuable inbox space, letting you manage large amounts of e-mail with ease. Conversation View

also hides entire conversations you don't care about and condenses them with just a few clicks.

Broadcast Slide Show

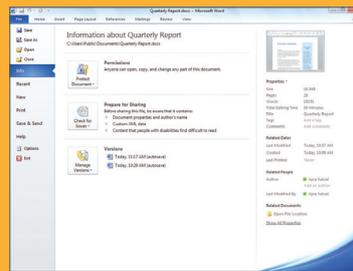
Instantly broadcast your PowerPoint slides to a remote audience, who can view your presentation online and on any device that has a Web browser, even if they don't have Microsoft PowerPoint 2010.

Video Editing and Formatting

There's no doubt that rich multimedia is becoming the default requirement for presentations with impact. You can now edit videos right in PowerPoint 2010 – with no additional software required. You can even insert a video link from the Internet into your presentation to create rich, dynamic work but keep file sizes manageable.

Sparklines

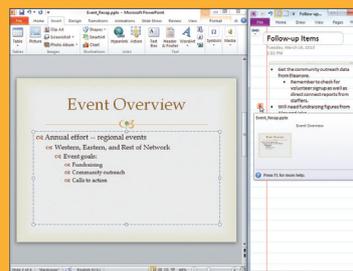
Sparklines are micro-charts embedded in an Excel worksheet cell that provide a clear and compact visual representation of your data. Use them to highlight trends in a series of values, or to create highly visual (and therefore easily understood) reports.



Backstage View

Backstage is a single location for essential information about your document, for example permissions and version details. Backstage also offers you increased

sharing options for printing, online distribution, and e-mail. Printing is faster and easier than ever with simple print preview – which lets you see your document and settings automatically before you print.



Linked Notes

No more searching for scribbled notes. As you take notes, you can automatically link them to one another and to documents or applications that you

have referenced, including Internet Explorer® pages and Office documents.

But surely...?

My earlier edition of Office (2003 or 2007) is still just as good as 2010...

Office 2010 is a major step forward in improving both the user experience and breadth of functionality in the key areas of e-mail, document creation and information sharing. There's nothing wrong with older systems, but they are not making the best use of newer advances in online data and collaboration, or able to link in with other key Microsoft products like Microsoft SharePoint®. Furthermore, earlier releases like Office 2003 are no longer supported free of charge (although security updates are still automatic); so compatibility can no longer be guaranteed.

Microsoft software isn't secure...

Office 2010 is one of the most secure and road-tested pieces of software on the market, with some 7 million beta customers having pushed it to its logical limits already. Plus, with the new 'sandbox' feature (equivalent to a similar function in Internet Explorer), you can never open a document unless you are sure it's from a safe source, reducing the opportunity for malware to infect your PC.

Only crazy people spend money on IT in a recession...

Not true. Smart businesses invest now for profit later. Do you use a mobile phone or a PC that's 7 years old? Technology, especially with the Internet, has come a long way even from when Office 2007 was released; and businesses need to draw competitive advantage from these advances. When you think about all the costs involved in running a business, providing your staff with the best productivity tools to do their job reflects a very small percentage – especially if you compare it to the increased labour costs of staff who don't have the right tools for the job!

I can get all this for free online...

There are other desktop productivity options, yes. But Office is the market leader with decades of heritage and a billion-dollar R&D and support budget. That's the difference between enterprise-grade software that's still going to be around tomorrow and will grow with your business, compared with some online services which come without guaranteed availability or futureproofing.

Useful resources:

For small business technology advice

www.microsoft.com/uk/smallbusiness

To download a beta or trial of Office 2010

www.microsoft.com/uk/office2010smallbusiness

Microsoft recommends to get the most from your IT, you use a Microsoft Small Business Specialist

www.microsoft.com/uk/sbspecialist

