

Changes in Microsoft Office 2010 Require Careful Evaluation

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Office 2010 offers collaboration tools and a free Web version aimed at recouping mind share from competitors. The Web version will suffice for some, but users should consider privacy issues and the limited feature set.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 13 July 2009, Microsoft disclosed details of the next version of its Office suite, Office 2010, due in 1H10. Major changes include:

- New collaboration features that allow users to more easily edit content simultaneously (requires SharePoint for non-hosted versions)
- A Web-based version that includes the Fluent ribbon interface
- The addition of OneNote to all volume-licensed stock keeping units (SKUs); SharePoint Workspace — formerly Groove — is included in the Professional Plus SKU
- The elimination of the Enterprise and Small Business SKUs

Analysis

These changes reflect the evolving way people work, and address growing competition from vendors such as Google and Zoho in the Web-based office products space. OneNote, an often-overlooked free-form content organization product, moves from niche product for students and consultants to first-class Office citizen. Microsoft intends for it to be a collaboration hub with which users can share ideas and track content from various sources. Microsoft is also adding the Fluent interface to other Office products that did not get the user interface treatment in the 2007 version, including Outlook and OneNote. It has made improvements to SharePoint integration with Office 2010 and repositioned the Groove product as supporting offline use of selected SharePoint libraries and lists.

To many, the most interesting part of Office 2010 will be the Web-based components. Gartner expects the Web-based version to have a small subset of the features of the full version, but for some users, this will be enough. There will be a free ad-based version, as well as versions that enterprises can host themselves. Enterprises interested in the free version need to consider data storage and privacy issues, as well as the limited feature set.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enterprises without Software Assurance (SA) running Office 2003:

- Consider skipping Office 2007 and deploying Office 2010 to receive longer-term support. After 2010, it is unlikely there will be time for a future version to ship for deployment before 2014, when security fix support ends for Office 2003.

Enterprises without SA that have not yet deployed Office 2007:

- Consider delaying deployment until Office 2010 ships — even if you choose to deploy Office 2007 — so you can purchase 2010 licenses and get an extra release for your money.

Enterprises with SA expiring after 1 November 2009 and before Office 2010 ships:

- Contact Microsoft and use your displeasure about not receiving a new version of Office during your contract term in negotiating renewal.

All enterprises:

- Consider deploying Office 2010 together with Windows 7, but recognize that if Office 2010 ships later than Microsoft expects, the delay could slow the start of both projects.
- Consider the free Web-based version of Office 2010, which will be ad-funded, for users with minimal requirements, but realize that the feature set will be greatly reduced and storage of files will be in the cloud. Enterprises with Microsoft Enterprise Agreements will not save money using this feature unless the users or devices are contractually excluded from True-Up, the part of the agreement that requires additional payment for added users.
- Continue monitoring office productivity application developments from Microsoft, OpenOffice.org, Google, Zoho, Corel and others to understand the options available.

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Enterprises Should Demand Windows Upgrade Option" — Enterprises should understand their Windows 7 requirements and learn how to obtain rights for the best value. **By Michael Silver**
- "Considering Alternatives to Microsoft Office" — Despite the hype over alternatives to Microsoft Office, many enterprises that are not ready to upgrade to Windows 7 should stay with a viable version of Office. **By Michael Silver**

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