

UnderstandIT

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A publication designed to inform and enable businesses to understand the implications, costs and advantages of using Information and Communications Technology. Distributed through Chambers of Commerce.

OFFICE 2007 – MORE WOW?

In the last edition, we provided extensive coverage of the new version of Windows – Vista, launched with much media hype and Microsoft spin using the by-line “The Wow starts Now!”

This month we are spending some time on another product, launched by Microsoft to coincide with that of Vista. The new version of the Microsoft Office suite has been ‘imaginatively’ called Office 2007. It has received somewhat less hype than Vista, but the new suite is also the first upgrade to Office since 2003, and it has undergone some quite radical changes.

As with Vista, Office 2007 comes in a bewildering number of different versions, each designed to meet the requirements of specific market sector. There are 7 versions from which you can choose, and the components provided in each version are:

Home and Student - includes Word, Excel, Powerpoint and OneNote

Standard – includes Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook

Small Business – includes Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook (with Business Contact Manager), Publisher and Accounting Express

Professional – includes Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook (with Business Contact Manager), Publisher, Accounting Express and Access

Professional Plus- includes Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook (with Business Contact Manager), Publisher, Access, Communicator and Infopath

Enterprise - includes Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook (with Business Contact Manager), Publisher, Access, Communicator, Infopath, Groove and OneNote

Ultimate - includes Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook (with Business Contact Manager), Publisher, Access, Infopath, Groove, OneNote and Accounting Express.

Some of the components above may not be familiar to you, so the following is a brief explanation of these:

OneNote

This is an “electronic note book” that can be used to store ad hoc notes, formal documents, graphics, photos, emails, audio recordings, web links and almost any other type of electronic information. Typically it would be used to gather and store supporting information for a presentation, complex report, thesis, meeting or other work task.

Communicator

This component provides a universal communication tool that enables you to manage your communications and allow you to communicate live/online using Instant Meseenger, voice or video from a single, integrated interface/window. You can manage your presence and status so that others will know your current status and even location. It will also, for example, allow you to view the contacts and whether they are currently online, whilst in an email message or preparing a Word document etc.

Accounting Express

This is a fairly basic accounting package that uses a familiar Office document interface to allow you to managing your accounts from quotations, through sales, invoicing and receiving payments. Integrated tightly with other Office components.

Groove

This allows multiple users in different locations or even countries to collaborate on master documents, whether they are reports, presentations or any other type of document. It controls versions and maintains the status of each document across an entire (networked) organisation. Also includes live chat facilities so that colaboration can continue online across continents if necessary.

Infopath

This component allows you to create and manage electronic forms that can be distributed to staff or others and filled in on-line. Any type of form can be created and fields within the form can be controlled for type of input, verification etc.

Business Contact Manager for Outlook is an add-in. It can actually be downloaded and added to the 2003 version of Outlook now and is automatically included in the Office 2007 version of Outlook. The add-in provides additional features and facilities for managing virtually anything to do with your business contacts. Go here to find out more:

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook/HP102186801033.aspx>

There are proponents and detractors of Microsoft Office (in fact, of all Microsoft products), but you need to carefully weigh up whether you are going to gain significant business benefit to justify the investment in any upgrade. Every new verion of Office extends the features and facilities of each component, as well as adding a plethora of new components, as can be seen from the above decriptions. Do you use the existing features and facilities, let alone justify more?

WINDOWS VISTA – AN UPDATE

We devoted a good deal of space to last month's article on the new Vista operating system from Microsoft. Despite undertaking extensive beta testing of the product prior to its formal launch, the mainstream and IT press is already full of pages of comment about problems experienced with the new version.

Many of the problems we have encountered seem to result from those planning to upgrade their existing copies of Windows XP or 2000 to Vista.

Microsoft have produced a software tool (the Windows Upgrade Advisor) that can be freely downloaded from here:

http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windows_vista/buyorupgrade/upgradeadvisor.msp

This tool examines your computer system and provides extensive advice on its suitability for running Vista.

However, it would appear that even if given a clean bill of health by this Microsoft tool, many users are experiencing extreme difficulty. The problem areas appear to be principally with the availability of drivers for miscellaneous hardware components (graphics cards, sound cards, webcams, mice and other components).

Despite what the upgrade advisor indicates, we would advise anyone contemplating an upgrade to carefully check each of the hardware components on the system(s) concerned and determine if the manufacturer of each has a Vista-compatible driver available now (not the promise of one sometime in the future).

In addition to hardware compatibility problems, software might also provide a problem for anyone contemplating an upgrade, particularly the vendors of Anti-virus and spyware software. Many of these companies have had to produce completely new versions to work with Vista. The existing versions will not work and will have to be upgraded. This all adds to the cost of any proposed upgrade.

This situation is not unlike that experienced when Windows XP first appeared. Our advice is to consider carefully the business benefits you are likely to gain from any upgrade. Alternatively, wait for 6 months until more drivers are generally available and the first patches to any vulnerabilities are produced.

A further option is to purchase a new computer from a mainstream manufacturer that has Vista pre-installed. You can then be confident that Vista will work and the hardware components installed will function with it, or you will have immediate redress from the manufacturer/dealer.

Should you be considering an upgrade and would like some assistance in either the decision-making process or the actual upgrade itself, then please call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457.

MICROSOFT LIVE ONECARE

This edition of *Understand IT* has turned out to be devoted entirely to Microsoft products! However, it has been a period when many new Microsoft products have been released, launched or just being beta tested.

This final article deals with yet another new product from THAT company – Live OneCare. It is actually a group of services, each one resulting from past acquisitions by Microsoft of companies who had developed a leading-edge product.

Microsoft has brought these products together to produce a package that provides these basic functions:

- Anti-virus protection
- Anti-spyware
- Anti-phishing
- System performance tuning
- Firewall
- Critical file back-up

The three primary areas of the product are as follows:

Protection Plus, - this has antivirus and antispyware scanners, a two-way firewall, and integrated anti-phishing technology. These all help to protect you from viruses, worms, Trojan horses, hackers, phishing, and other threats. It runs continuously in the background whilst your computer is switched on.

Performance Plus – this module regularly defragments your hard disk, removes any unnecessary files that can clog your computer, and helps make sure important security updates from Microsoft are installed efficiently and on time.

Backup and Restore – finally, this module regularly copies your important files and settings to CD, DVD, external hard disk, network drive, or other data-storage device.

You can now download a 90-day trial copy of the Live OneCare software, to allow you to assess its functionality and ease of use. When the trial has expired, you can purchase a copy for US\$49.95 (around £26), which covers 3 computers. This cost includes updates to the database for one year.

We wish to acknowledge with thanks that some of the material contained within this publication has been sourced from Computer Weekly, PC Pro, BBC and other reputable sources..

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Information on other Business and IT services can be found on our web site at: <http://www.maydayconsulting.co.uk> or by calling Alan Finch on 07968 262079.

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