Microsoft Office 2010:
Saving you the time you need to compete

In a tight economy, nobody wants to buy technology for technology's sake. That's why Microsoft® Office 2010, the latest version of Microsoft's world-leading office productivity software is packed with features designed to help your business become visibly more competitive. If you thought Office was just about great looking documents, read on...

For the small business looking for opportunity as the UK economy continues its tentative recovery from the deepest recession since the War, cost control has to remain a key priority. Therefore, any potential expenditure has to be considered very carefully. Before shelling out, companies are looking for real value back to the business. Even though very few organisations could function these days without IT of some sort, software is no exception: small companies will only buy it if it's going to help them up their game.

That's even more the case when it's an upgrade. If you already have a previous version of Office, for example, you might be wondering why you should bother to upgrade to the latest version. That's why many organisations have held off in the past from moving beyond tried and trusted workhorses to something new and different.

Whilst that's a perfectly understandable argument, the problem is that the business world has changed dramatically in the last few years and yesterday's great software may no longer match up to today's requirements. Yes, a letter is a letter is a letter. But wouldn't you be more productive if:

- Your documents could be accessed and co-authored by everyone in your business – including suppliers and even customers if appropriate?
- You could easily embed online and multimedia assets like video and images?
- Your documents could include up-to-the-minute information, neatly calculated or customised automatically?
- Everyone working on a document could be safe in the knowledge that their version is up-to-date?

If you don't think so, you can bet your competitors do. If staff are working at full pelt (and if you're a one-man company, that means you!), the only way to become more competitive is to work smarter, not harder. And better technology is the ideal solution. All of the above benefits can be found in Office 2010. "No one has a mobile phone that's seven or eight years old," points out Kerry Bentley, SMB Marketing Manager for Microsoft. "By the same measure, software like Office 2010 that's the result of four years engineering by 3,500 engineers from a company that spends a billion dollars a year on R&D is going to offer functionality that other systems just won't have."

Every second counts

"So much time can get wasted in a business day that you just could do without losing," says Bentley. "If technology can get some of that time back and help you get on top of things, it has to be worth evaluating."

We would love to say that buying back time would allow you to put your feet up. However, today's business world is truly 24x7, 365 days a year. Gone are the days when you could post off a copy of the brochure or fax a quote over by the end of the week. By then, your competitors will have already taken the deal out from under your nose, by providing information and service on the spot. That's why much of the effort in Office 2010 has gone into simplifying the repetitive tasks we do every day; and making them more user-friendly.

Take e-mail. Even after all the spam is stripped out, the average business person will be looking at over 100 e-mails a day. How can they be processed correctly in limited time so as not to become an overwhelming and constant burden? Well, how about a way of working through e-mail

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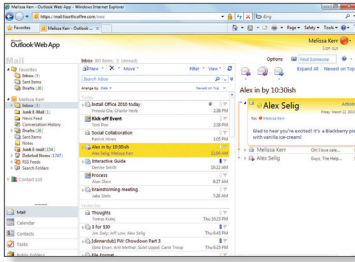
that stripped out the chaff and grouped it into sensible groups of messages? It's called "**Conversation View**", and the idea is that you can see at a glance what's new, relevant or of interest, maintain dialogue with a customer or prospect more clearly and generally make better use of e-mail. It becomes a productivity aid instead of a time-waster. Try totting up the time you've spent in the past year running e-mail searches for the long-lost ends of a customer conversation and you'll appreciate the value of these tools.

Looking to tomorrow

The business of today looking to survive needs to work on being as competitive as it can – seeking advantage and opportunity wherever possible. But smart businesses aren't just thinking about surviving today; they are looking for profitable advantage tomorrow. That means keeping existing valuable customers happy as well as unearthing new ones. Information Technology, in particular the way you hold, marshal and use data about those all important customers – is in fact not peripheral but central to the problem of keeping ahead of the competition. That's why the Office 2010 suite contains a version called Professional Plus, which includes a customer relationship management package with tools previously only found on bespoke professional CRM systems.

Thinking about tomorrow also means investing in new relationships now, so that they can bear fruit in the months to come. A good business leader will be looking to work out how to make every relationship as productive and profitable as he or she can. A great example is the new hot topic of Social Networking for business. More and more business owners are connecting with potential customers and partners through sites like LinkedIn or Twitter. Wouldn't it be great to integrate your everyday desktop word processing and e-mailing straight into that? Well, with the new Social Connector system in Office 2010, says Guy Gregory, Technical Specialist with Microsoft **Small Business Specialist** Peak Support Services, you can do just that:

"Networking online is such a growing focus for both us and our customers and I personally have found the ability with this system to connect straight from my Outlook into my LinkedIn presence really saving me time."

Social Connector is just one part of a whole set of new features in Office 2010 that turns the standard desktop-located Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel® and Microsoft PowerPoint® packages into vehicles for rapidly and seamlessly accessing a wide range of great new tools on the Internet. That's the idea behind "Office Web Apps"; a growing suite of online tools which integrate with Office 2010. These apps offer a wide range of options for the business user, for example allowing different personnel in your company to work on the same document in a structured way from different locations – another feature Gregory says both he and his small business customers are finding really valuable.

"Business is increasingly online and all about making connections and using the Web as much as you can," he says. "That's why software that so easily extends your existing normal Word or PowerPoint is a great help."

The Web Apps suite also includes the ability to easily and safely store and share important files online with the new SkyDrive™; and Microsoft OneNote® which organises information from almost any source to make raw data usable and actionable.

Office 2010 is resource friendly

Another benefit of the new Office 2010 is that if you have recently upgraded your PC or laptop to take advantage of the new Windows® 7 operating system, Office 2010 dovetails neatly into all the new functions that Windows 7 provides; like Jump Lists, a way to group all the things you've been working on recently so they're never more than one mouse click away. But just as nicely; you can run Office 2010 on an older version of Windows and it will still be happy. That means upgrading your software won't automatically mean the added expense of upgrading your hardware too.

For the business user, then, a lot of careful work and thought has gone into making Office 2010 as time-saving, useful and business-focused as possible. With two 'flavours' of Office available – Home and Business and Professional Plus – you can choose the set of applications that best suits your needs right now, be that the extensive base set of products in Home and Business or the more advanced version which includes the upgraded Professional Plus mini-CRM system.

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With so much on offer, designed to make a real difference to your viability and the length of your workday, it's no longer defensible to feel safe using old versions of software.

If your current productivity software only works in isolation, on the desktop, you're missing out. If you can't access and work with proposals and quotes on the road, you're missing out. If your fingers are raw from repetitive jobs, you're missing out. And if you can't plug into the wealth of professional templates and time-savers online – guess what – you're missing out again.

Useful resources:

For information on Office 2010
www.microsoft.com/uk/smallbusiness/office

Featured Small Business Specialist
Peak Support Services
www.peaksupport.co.uk

To find a small business specialist in your area
www.microsoft.com/uk/sbspecialist

Case study - Bagshaws

One UK business that has definitely seen productivity improvements through using Office 2010 is auction firm Bagshaws (www.bagshaws.com). "Because of the intuitive design of Office 2010, we've found features we never knew were there before. The good stuff is front and centre so we're getting more out of our applications," says the company's IT Manager, Jude Pealing.

To better manage all the complex e-mail and scheduling Jude needs to do; plus make document creation go better and streamline the production of professional-quality materials, Bagshaws has been trying out early versions of Office 2010.

Jude says the firm has increased internal efficiency and expedited the creation of legal documents, brochures, and presentations, with the "more intuitive" Microsoft Outlook® greatly reducing the amount of time spent working with e-mails and calendars. "I love how we can see two or three different calendars at once – the level of detail is extremely helpful. Scheduling is so much more efficient", she says.

Meanwhile Conversation View has completely transformed the way Pealing and her team manage their inboxes, saving up to 30% of the time spent searching for and sorting e-mails. All in all she says, "I love how Office 2010 makes it so easy to get to the functions we need. Everything is more user-friendly. I rarely need to use Help anymore – everything is self-explanatory". Based on the vast improvements the company has seen in the relatively short amount of time since implementing Office 2010, this business expects efficiency and productivity to soar as it continues to explore the system's capabilities.

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