

# Microsoft Office Professional 2007



I evaluated the Professional edition of Microsoft Office 2007, with special emphasis on the Outlook email system, Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. I tested Office on my HP Compaq Presario 2100 using Windows XP SP2 and 1/2GB of memory.

(For many details that I couldn't include in this review, visit my blog: <http://contentcurmudgeon.blogspot.com>.)

Microsoft offers a wide range of editions. For this product, there are eight, ranging from Basic through the new Enterprise 2007. All editions include Word and Excel. Only the Ultimate and Enterprise editions contain Groove, the new collaboration tool. The Professional edition includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook with Business Contact Manager, Publisher, and Accounting Express (U.S. only). Office is packaged with a single installation CD plus an instruction manual. Running Office products in "compatibility mode" allowed me to import and export very complex Excel, PowerPoint, and Word documents flawlessly.

Like OpenOffice applications, Microsoft Office now uses a multiple-file, compressed format it calls "Open XML" for Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. This format is essentially a ZIP file containing separate text, graphics, and other information files for its primary office applications: Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. In earlier office editions, Microsoft used a proprietary internal format (such as "Rich Text Format" in Word). Now, instead of a ".DOC" file extension (for example), the spelling ".DOCX" is used for the file extension.

Open XML allows these primary applications to work more consistently with each other. This new format has several advantages, the most obvious of which is that the new format keeps the size of Office files small—about half the size of older file counterparts. By separating text, graphics, and other components, documents should be more stable. For example, if your document has a corrupted graphic, you should be able to replace the bad graphic and resume using the document. If you want to exchange a document with someone using an earlier version of an Office suite program (excepting Outlook), they must use Office 2007, you must save the document using the office "com-

#### PURPOSE:

Enhances ease of using Office products, makes operations more consistent across products, and saves documents in a new XML-based format to make them smaller and easier to manage and analyze.

#### STARTING PRICE:

\$429 estimated retail; \$329 to update from certain versions of Microsoft Works and any 2000–2007 Microsoft Office program or suite.

#### REVIEWER'S VIEW:

Office 2007 improves ease of use and fixes many long-standing shortcomings. Set aside time for analyzing the benefits and constraints of each Office 2007 edition and possible costs to upgrade from versions of Windows prior to XP. Then prepare your installation carefully. New users will find Office 2007 easier to learn than earlier versions; existing power users will have much to unlearn.

patibility" mode to give them the version they can open and use, or they must load a "compatibility pack."

The first screen shot in this review shows four views of this new file format. Starting at the upper left and going clockwise through the lower left, you see: individual parts in a Word file; the contents of the "Word" folder; a small view of the XML that is part of document.xml within the "Word" folder; and that portion of the table as it appears in Word.

This brings back memories of WordPerfect reveal codes. However, instead of a single binary file whose codes are revealed, this packaging technique separates all the elements of the file so you can replace them—such as a corrupted graphic or

**NEW USER INTERFACE**

The new interface is more intuitive, so after learning it you will probably be more productive. Displays specific task-oriented menus and toolbars depending on the feature you are using.

**NEW FILE FORMATS**

Gone are the old binary formats. In their place are industry standard "ZIP" compressed packages. This single-package format reduces the file sizes and separates graphic, text, and other modules for more reliability and an opportunity to integrate office files with enterprise applications.

**EXCELLENT IMPORT AND EXPORT OF PRIOR CLASSIC FORMATS**

Import "classic" pre-2007 files and export 2007 files for users who do not yet have Office 2007 flawlessly.

**INTEGRATION**

If you also use certain Microsoft enterprise products, such as SharePoint, they can work hand-in-glove with Office.

a boilerplate graphic. You can even perform XML transformations or queries on the XML components. That latter capability provides the opportunity to integrate office data with applications such as SharePoint.

For a look at some strategic office suite considerations, be sure to read this month's Information Insider column.

**INSTALLATION**

Installing Office 2007 requires at least a 500MHz processor, with a minimum 256MB of RAM, 2GB of hard disk space—in addition to whatever you need to install the applications you select from Office. You must be running Windows XP SP2, Windows Server 2003 with SP1, or the current Vista system. You will also need a CD-ROM or DVD drive and a monitor with 1024x768 resolution or higher. These are minimum requirements. Certain features (like contextual spelling in Word) require at least 1GB of memory.

Installation on my laptop was somewhat complicated and not trouble-free. I spent nearly an hour on the initial custom installation, then installed separate downloads. I selected the default

**Microsoft Corporation** (NASDAQ "MSFT"), founded in 1975, is a worldwide leader in software, hardware, services, and solutions. Examples of hardware products are gaming products like the Xbox, mice, and keyboards. Software ranges include client, server, and online products. Examples range from client-based Windows operating systems such as Windows Vista, integrated office solutions, and server-based software such as the SharePoint Portal Server. Microsoft's headquarters are in Redmond, Washington.

Office shared features and Office tools (Microsoft Office Graph and Microsoft Document Imaging) although it wasn't explained what they are. When I finished, the system prompted me to go to Office Online for to activate the program and for updates. I have standardized on Mozilla. Thus, after about five minutes thinking I was downloading updates, I received a message that I had to use Internet Explorer version 5.0 or higher. I switched to IE and downloaded and installed "OGAPlugininstall." Note: This automatic Office update did not include the ability to save files in Acrobat PDF format. That was a separate download and installation of the "SaveasPDFandXPS" file.

**OUTLOOK EMAIL**

Because the interface is so similar to earlier versions, I found learning Outlook was the easiest of the four applications I tested. You don't even see the new "ribbon" until you begin composing email, calendar entry, or the like.

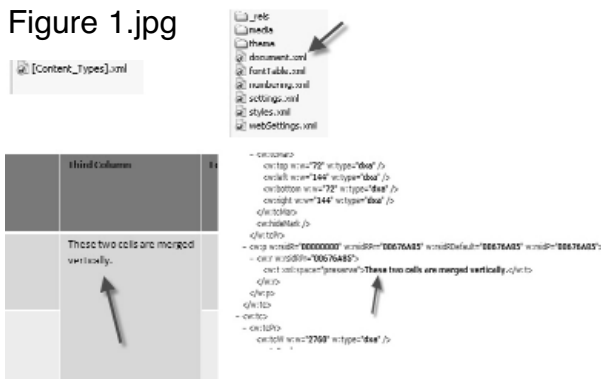
New to Outlook is a "To Do" bar that shows you upcoming appointments and tasks. Outlook also provides an RSS folder for centralizing RSS feeds into an Outlook folder. If Outlook users also use Microsoft SharePoint, they can view tasks, documents, and messages without leaving Outlook. You can continue to exchange email with others using earlier versions of Outlook or other email systems. Outlook continues to save mail files in the PST file; since it does not use the XML format, the PST file is not smaller than in earlier Outlook versions.

I routinely synched my Palm Pilot with Outlook 2003, and I needed to download an upgraded version of synch software to do this with Outlook. Old issue not fixed: When you change a contact's email address, it isn't automatically updated in distribution lists containing that contact until you update the distribution list. That means you have to remember which distribution lists contain the contact so you can update each list.

**WORD**

I've been a Word power user ever since it became the de facto

Figure 1.jpg



Components in the new Word compressed “.DOCX” file

corporate standard. If I had had no prior experience with Word, I would probably have found it much easier to learn than I did earlier versions. Prior knowledge is actually an impediment to learning the Word 2007, even with its improvements.

Similar to the Windows “Start” icon, Office tools now sport a “Home” icon where you’ll find commonly used functions like Open and Save files. Major functions are now grouped in tabs, like Home and Insert. Click on the appropriate tab and you’ll see nicely arranged clusters of icons for tasks related to that tab.

Microsoft has made significant and long overdue improvements to Word. Among my favorites is an improved table model consistent with that in Excel and PowerPoint. Microsoft has finally fixed the prompt you used to get after printing a document you’d saved: “Do you want to save the changes?” To be on the safe side, I always re-saved the document. That would make save dates printed on footers different from the newly re-saved version.

There are so many changes in the user interface and terminology that experienced users will spend time unlearning the old version and acclimating to the new system. Help, a perennial problem, remains unhelpful. When I tried to find out how to get a “normal” view, I got nowhere until I went to an MS Office discussion group and learned that the new name for “normal” is “draft” (unless you’re using PowerPoint, where the name is still “normal”). When I searched Help for “style window” I got 100 hits, none of them relevant. This problem seemed to be a pattern with Help—if you look for information about a feature whose name is changed in Word 2007, you get little guidance.

**EXCEL**

Like Word and PowerPoint, Excel has undergone major renovation—both functionally and in its user interface. This upgrade is really worth having. Excel has many functional enhancements, produces smaller file sizes, and has fixed a memory-related bug that I used to experience in earlier versions. Apart from learning the new interface and remembering to use the compatibility

Figure 2.jpg



Examples of the new Word interface

mode when needed, I found no downsides.

**POWERPOINT**

Microsoft has worked hard to achieve a truly elegant set of styles along with some new fonts and much-improved consistency between the various Office programs. I especially like the consistency maintained with tables that allow you to easily interchange between Word, Excel and PowerPoint, fixing a serious issue with earlier versions of PowerPoint. A new, softer look subtly suggests that you can approach Office 2007 comfortably, and this is especially true of PowerPoint. This right-brain improvement in all the applications isn’t something you’ll see in feature checklists, but seeing is believing.

One deficiency PowerPoint did not fix is the use of styles. If you have existing objects, such as bullets, and change the style via the master, the change doesn’t apply to the existing objects, only to those you create later. You must create a slide master before you start to build individual slides, rather than after. A truly styles-based system would let you change your mind about the look of a particular kind of object, then apply your change to all the objects of that type.

**SHOULD YOU UPGRADE?**

Now, the most important question of all: Should you upgrade? Moving to Office 2007 requires time, careful analysis, and planning. This is not a simple upgrade due to the dramatically new and improved design. Here are some rules of thumb.

If you are strongly committed to Microsoft products, if you value an office suite that is tightly integrated with a client-based email system, or if you want to integrate office tools with Microsoft enterprise applications, then the answer is yes. Plan carefully and upgrade to Office 2007.

If you are running a version of Windows earlier than XP, you are sensitive to licensing costs, or you are attracted to open source suites, take a look at solid alternatives such as OpenOffice, StarOffice 8, and even WordPerfect suites. These options are

even more attractive if you do not have big investments in complex macros. ■

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