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Navigating the Upgrade Path to Microsoft Office 2007

Businesses are Migrating to this Substantially Changed Business Productivity Suite. Is Your Organization Prepared to Manage the Change?

By Michael Einbinder-Schatz

Have you heard of the dysfunctional office that has a loony boss, surrounded by a cast of characters that you can't imagine actually getting any real work done?

No, it's not the Steve Carell situation comedy, *The Office* (based on the BBC series created and starring the brilliant Ricky Gervais). However, you may have seen this situation playing out at a local office near you as businesses struggle to figure out the optimal way to implement Microsoft Office 2007. It can drive some bosses loony, to be sure. It can also make it so a business' casts of characters (aka the staff) struggle to get their real work done, as they try to learn how to navigate a significantly changed suite of programs.

Unrealistic? Not at all. Frustrating? You bet it can be! Compounding it is the fact that for the past few months, new PC manufactures have no longer been

allowed to bundle Office 2003 with new machines. If you are buying a new machine and are used to purchasing the software license with the new machine, you should know that it is now Office 2007 and only 2007.

Now, if this were any other Office upgrade over the last 10 years, it wouldn't be such a big deal. However, Microsoft Office 2007 represents the most significant rewrite of the software since Office 1997 came out. Not only did Microsoft change the entire file structure within their applications, but they also completely re-designed the user interface. The interface incorporates a Ribbon Bar that is common across the Office applications. Having spent several months familiarizing myself with the new version (and finding myself often stumped over things I seemingly mastered years ago), I am beginning to see the wisdom of Microsoft's new approach. Doubtless it will offer

significant improvements across office environments. However, rolling out Office 2007 must be done with pre-planning, not only at the implementation level, but also at the purchasing level. Mixed environments (those that have some machines with different versions of Office) might have not presented concerns in the past. However, with the file structure changes, and learning curve issues inherent in this new release, a mixed environment can open up a Pandora's box of problems...all of which can affect your businesses ability to conduct business (not a good thing in our opinion).

As an example consider the case of an accounting firm. Let's say they have 20 computers and need to replace five at the beginning of the year as part of their regularly scheduled upgrade cycle. Of course, January through April 15th is not a time that an accounting firm wants to devote energy to learning a new version of its' Office suite, as they are typically neck deep in tax season. If they upgrade 25% of their machines, they are looking at the potential of a mixed environment, which can result in file sharing issues, especially on complex spreadsheets. Of course, we could recommend that the machines not be upgraded until after April 15th, but in some cases, the upgrades might be essential for other reasons.

The good news is that while Microsoft is seemingly closing some doors and

apparently forcing an upgrade, they are presenting extremely compelling options that can allow you to completely take control of this process.

What does this mean?

Well for one, properly planning the software license purchase can allow you to continue using the version of Office you have been on your new machines, all while securing the ability to upgrade your entire office to the new version when you are ready.

This can be accomplished by using a licensing model that rewards your staff with available home use licenses, discounted employee purchase licenses (for those extra home family machines), provides an incentive to employees to get the jump on the learning curve by adopting the upgrade at home, before you go live in the office, and allows you to spread out your payments, so your initial outlay is significantly reduced.

The full details of how this can be accomplished is beyond the scope of this article (c'mon, there has to be a teaser to contact us...right?). What I will say is that is that it might be worth a 5-10 minute conversation to see if this makes sense for your business. One more thing: Microsoft is even offering cash incentives through the end of January for certain software license purchases, so if you find this at all intriguing, let me know and I'll do my best to help you before the deadline.

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