SIMformation

Office 2021 or Microsoft 365?

Microsoft Office is how billions of people around the world go to work and school, whether they do it from home, an office, a classroom, or a combination of any of those. This suite of productivity tools is used by people in nearly every country in the world, and it's available in versions for personal, small business, enterprise, and educational use.

But there is more than one way to "buy" Office – or, rather, to obtain the license to use it. There's the "perpetual" version of Office that's available as a one-time purchase; the most current version is Office 2021. Then there's the subscription version that lives in the cloud and for which you pay a monthly or annual fee. When this version was introduced in 2011, Microsoft called it Office 365, later renaming it Microsoft 365 for personal and small business subscriptions. At the enterprise level, both Office 365 and Microsoft 365 plans are available.

Why choose to buy it one way and not the other? The answer can be confusing, especially since each suite of tools includes most of the same applications, give or take. Microsoft has made its preference clear: The company believes that "the cloud will power the work of the future" and would love it if everyone purchased Microsoft 365. There are lots of incentives for doing just that. But you have options. Here's help deciding which version is right for you or your company.

One big difference between the "2021" and "365" options is how you pay for them. If you are buying a "perpetual license" (such as with Office Home & Business 2021), you pay a larger sum than with the subscription's offerings under the Microsoft 365 or Office 365 brand, but you do so only once. When you subscribe to any of the Microsoft 365 or Office 365 plans, you pay annually or monthly.

Whether you buy a single copy of Office 2021 Microsoft calls this is a "one-time purchase" because you pay only once, not every month. You have to ante up the entire purchase price before you get the software. A license for Office Professional is $440 for each employee's copy, so a large company could be faced with a big upfront bill.

That purchase of a license to legally run the software gives you the right to use that version of Office 2021 in perpetuity. In other words, the license has no expiration date, and users may run the suite for as long as they want. Use it for the next seven years? Fine. But if you want new features that come out with the next update, you will have to pay full price again, whatever that is, when the next version comes out – if one comes out. There are no upgrade options on the perpetual license packages.

Microsoft 365, the purchase method Microsoft would prefer you choose, is a subscription service, where you pay monthly or annually. There is a discount, sometimes a tempting one, for going with the annual payment plan over the monthly one. Again, you have to license each employee, but the per-month cost can be as low as $10 per employee depending on package selected.

Like any subscription, Microsoft 365 provides a service – in this case, the right to run the suite's applications and access the associated services – only as long as payments continue. Stop paying, and rights to run the apps expire. This happens in a progressive way, giving you a 30 day window to download your data or update your payment plan. After 90 days of non-payment, all data is deleted – permanently.

Although payments define one difference between Office 2021 and Microsoft 365, Microsoft's development and release pace can be more important to users. Think of Office 2021 as traditional software – a bundle of tools that typically don't change much until the next major version. That holds for servicing, too. Microsoft does release monthly security and quality updates for the perpetual license versions of Office. But Office 2021 doesn't get the continually upgraded features and functionality that Microsoft 365 does. What you get when you buy the suite, feature-wise, is it. If you want the updates, at some point in the future, you will have to buy whatever version Microsoft is selling as a perpetual license then.

Microsoft regularly releases feature and security updates for Microsoft 365 apps. And it releases them as they happen. As new features and functionality arrive, and the applications in Microsoft 365 evolve, Microsoft will decide it's time for a new version of Office. It will then package some of those features into an upgraded suite for customers who continue to make one-time, up-front purchases.

Another reason to choose Office 2021 over Microsoft 365 is internet access. If you don't have reliable access to the cloud, can't be connected to the internet for security reasons, or your computer is often offline, this is the type of software you need. Microsoft 365 uses One Drive to store your work, so a reliable Internet connection is mandatory to load Word or Excel (and the others) and then to access and save work files.

Whichever license you ultimately choose, you will get many of the same tools. And the reasons for making one choice over another have less to do with price and features than with how you or your users work, support and security needs, reliability of internet access, online storage and collaboration needs. SIM2K can help you determine which path is best suited for your employees and your budget for what has become an essential business tool these days. Call us for more information.

SIMformation

Tips to Improve Virtual Meetings

The worst of the pandemic is over (we hope) but the reliance on Zoom, Teams, Skype and all the other videoconferencing platforms will not go away any time soon. Businesses have found these tools to be useful, whether it is supporting work from home people, remote staff or multiple offices. Millions of people continue to work from home thanks to fast Wi-Fi, laptops and web cameras for web chats.

There are steps people can take to improve their virtual meeting experience. Here are some tips:

Ensure a strong Wi-Fi Signal. Video calls are bandwidth intensive, so make sure you have a strong connection. You may need to work close to your router, or upgrade your router to a more robust version. Or, if you can, use a wired connection from your laptop to the router and forego Wi-Fi for video calls.

Improve your lighting. Have good lights in your workspace so that others on the call can see you clearly., A floor lamp or tabletop light placed behind your computer pointed towards you will help. But watch out for the angle of it, especially if you wear glasses, so the reflection of the light doesn't hide your eyes (the dreaded "halo ring" effect from some personal lights.)

Watch your camera placement. Nobody wants to be able to see up your nose. You may have to elevate your laptop so the camera looks down on you for a more flattering angle. If you don't have a riser for your laptop, put a couple of books under it to adjust the angle.

"You're so vain.." If you are concerned how you look on camera, most video chat programs have a filter to "touch up" your look – and even make you look younger! Check your program settings for these filters, and experiment before entering a call (you don't want to be a talking cat if you choose the wrong filter!) Remember that a HD webcam will show more imperfections than a built-in camera, so be aware of your "look" on camera.

Check your background. Hopefully you have a clean work area, or at least have a neutral wall behind you. Making a video call from a kitchen or bedroom can be distracting. Again, many video chat programs can also apply a virtual background (no green screen needed) to blur out distractions.

Make yourself heard. For best results, don't rely on the computer's built-in microphone, especially if there is some distance between you and the PC. Invest in a USB microphone, and even a set of Bluetooth earbuds to better hear the conversation. There are noise suppression options in some platforms, so check your Settings menu.

Sit up and be comfortable. If your chat sessions are prolonged, it is helpful to have a comfortable chair with good ergonomics to support you. Spending an hour on a hard kitchen chair can be torture. And be sure your screen is at a good angle so you don't get a crick in your neck.

Don't fixate on the screen. Don't get glassy-eyed staring at the screen. Make an effort to look away now and then just to let your eyes re-focus. Experts suggest looking at something 20 feet away every 20 minutes at maximum just to give your eyes a break.

Hopefully this will help you be your best for your next Zoom call.

Cybersecurity vs. Supply Chain

It's a conundrum. Cyber attacks are increasing, so companies have to step up the security platforms. However, the supply chain is struggling to keep up. In many cases, the components a company may need won't be in stock for months. The problems are so acute that 66% of companies say that supply chain issue will never end.

The world's most cutting-edge companies like Apple, Google, HP, Samsung, Intel, Cisco or Microsoft are technological leaders. Consumer devices like computers, smartphones and tablets or business hardware like routers, switches and servers are central to their competitiveness and economic power. The high-tech industry thrives on transformation and efficiency – creating world-leading products, then manufacturing and distributing them quickly and easily.

Of course, behind every innovation is a vast, complex, international, high-tech supply chain. For supply chain teams in technology companies, managing raw materials, parts and finished products through the high-tech sourcing and manufacturing process is a massive challenge.

Shipping is the most critical link in the supply chain. Few things are manufactured in the same place. Component parts are sourced globally and transported to the final point for completion. With increasing frequency, this link is stressed to the breaking point. The Port of Los Angeles saw more containers pass through last year, surpassing the previous record by 13%. Even so, in April of this year, one-fifth of global container ships were stuck in port congestion, so the freight handling system is not keeping pace with the demand for goods. Roughly a third of Texas manufacturers experiencing supply-chain disruptions say it will take a year or more for the supply chain to repair itself.

Given these issues, you would think companies are taking pro-active steps to fix the issue. While 94% of Fortune 100 companies have seen disruptions, less than half of companies surveyed by Sonicwall say they are taking long-term action on supply-chain challenges. They are looking for a "quick fix" to muddle through current issues and hope for the best in the long run.

Fortunately, some vendors saw the issues developing and have taken steps to ensure the ability to meet demand. SIM2K is a Sonicwall partner, and that company continues to fulfill 95% of orders within 3 days. This is in the face of the fact that it is taking 8 to 12 weeks for materials to get to Sonicwall from a supplier, 2 to 3 times pre-pandemic shipping times. Sonicwall has shifted their manufacturing outlook out 12 to 16 months to have components on-hand to meet demand.

SIM2K has taken steps to choose our technology partners based on their ability to fulfill orders and meet the deadlines to get the products our customers need. While the past few years have presented a challenge, we are taking every effort to deliver solutions to our customers when needed, not when something might come back into stock.

Private 5G Networks Coming

All the cell companies are pushing us to move to 5G networks for our public calling. On the flip side, they are also offering private 5G networks with a promise to offer low latency, high reliability, and support for massive numbers of connected devices. But, enterprise deployment has been slower than expected, experts say, due to the pandemic and a slow-to-evolve device ecosystem.

IDC reports that the global private LTE and 5G wireless infrastructure market totaled $1.8 billion in revenue in 2021 and will increase to $8.3 billion by 2026, but that spending will grow "slower than expected" in the next couple of years.

Price is also an issue. Since the hardware is new, the economies of scale haven't kicked in yet. And if a 5G project uses licensed spectrum, then there are the connectivity costs. Given the rise of the Internet of Things and connectivity of various devices, the question is "Do you want to be charged for every light or thermostat and pay for that connection?"

All the major cellular carriers in the United States have 5G projects in place, though coverage is limited. Enterprises can leverage these public networks for connectivity for drones and other vehicles, to support remote staff, for first responders, for wide area networks, or to support sensors and edge computing deployments. Enterprises can also use 5G for backup connectivity in case their landlines go out.

There are several ways for companies to integrate 5G networks. For example, a company can have a cell phone company build infrastructure to enable or enhance coverage and capacity in their location. Then there is a fully private option, which can be operated completely independent of a cell phone company and uses shared CBRS spectrum – Citizens Broadband Radio Service – or unlicensed spectrum such as 5G NR-U, which stands for New Radio Unlicensed.

All these different players are entering the 5G space, but the jury is still out on who will win and what model will really dominate the market when it comes to building and operating private 5G networks. As a network technology, 5G has become more mainstream for consumer usage as networks have been upgraded, but it hasn't quite taken hold in the enterprise or for private networks due to a lack of available solutions and clarity around what use cases will take full advantage of 5G's capabilities.

Having the right use cases is critical. The biggest mistake companies make when adopting 5G is getting caught up in it. Now they have a private 5G network – so what do they do with it? IT experts suggest companies test use in a lab environment before committing to a full roll-out of a private 5G system. For example, a challenge that companies can face is scalability. Companies need to aware that just because something works in a smaller setup, there's no guarantee that it will work in a bigger one.

Finally, there's the issue of interoperability. Companies may have a private 5G network from one group, then start connecting to other networks or other vendors. How do you ensure that they all talk to each other.

5G technology is still advancing, so early adopters of private 5G are feeling their way along carefully. But the technology does offer possibilities for IoT connectivity with traditional voice and video to create a seamless network. We will watch this trend.

"Random Tid-Bytes"

Car Data Could Be New Target

People probably don't realize how much data their cars are now generating. Most cars now multiple forms of connectivity, including Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and Near-Field Communications. This has given rise to a new classification – SDV, or Software Defined Vehicle. Also, the increase in autonomous vehicles (self-driving) requires reams of data to help guide your vehicle safely. But this data can lead to identifying your home, work, favorite shopping places, recreation and more. While automakers and the tech companies providing the autonomous programming are saying they strip out identification from the data stream, is that really the case. And what are they doing with this data? In 2016, McKinsey & Company speculated that monetization of autonomous data would be a $750 billion business by 2030. In fact, an Israeli business, Otonomo, has been accused of secretly collecting and selling real-time GPS data from more that 50 million cars, enabling its "clients" to easily pinpoint consumers' precise locations at all times of the day and gain insight about where they live, shop, worship and who they associate with. So maybe using your smartphone to unlock, start and monitor your car, or using GM's SuperCruise or Tesla's AutoDrive, are just opening a new Pandora's Box for hackers to obtain personal information. Buyers (and users) beware.

No More CAPTCHAs?

Apple took several steps toward a password-free future at its Worldwide Developer Conference, but another component of its strategy will be to replace CAPTCHA with a more private solution. Apple is working with Cloudflare, Google and Fastly to deploy a standardized alternative to CAPTCHA called Private Access Tokens. The theory behind Private Access Tokens is that by the time you arrive at a website, you have already crossed some hurdles that are hard for a bot to emulate. You probably use a device that is already unlocked using biometric authorization or a passcode. On Apple platforms, users are likely to be signed into the device with an Apple ID, and probably use a code-signed app. Private Access Tokens use this information to establish trust within technology currently being standardized by a Privacy Pass working group. Servers will request tokens using a new HTTP Authentication method called PrivateToken, which uses cryptographic techniques to verify a user has passed what is called an "attestation check." An attestation check can be understood as a highly secure, private, and trusted statement that tells the server the request is from a bona fide requestor. Once the attestation process completes, the server knows the request is not fraudulent and comes from a real person. There is much more to the process than this somewhat over-simplified explanation provides. For example, it also protects against access requests from compromised devices or bots. Apple and the other companies have not laid out a timetable for Private Access Tokens to be implemented, but hopefully this will mean we no longer have to squint at little pictures of traffic lights or bicycles to gain access to websites.

Study Shows Microsoft Teams Impact

A Forrester Consulting Total Economic Impact study of Microsoft Teams quantifies the benefits of Microsoft Teams for organizations and employees. Forrester interviewed and surveyed over 260 customers using Microsoft Teams in a wide range of industries, spanning financial services to education.

The study revealed these key benefits for implementing Microsoft Teams:

- Enables mobile employees to be more productive and better connected;
- Aids innovation better and faster in an increasingly competitive marketplace;
- Provides integrated collaborations solutions that scale, safeguard information and ensure compliance.

When asked, customers cited the following as challenges they face with their collaboration tools:

- Supporting global growth and collaboration across multiple locations and time zones;
- Enabling mobile employees to be more productive and better connected;
- Innovating better and faster in an increasingly competitive marketplace;
- Providing integrated collaboration solutions that scale, safeguard information and ensure compliance.

The study uncovered 11 benefits for companies to consider as they evaluate Teams as a primary communication and collaboration tool. The top 4 benefits are:

Teams reduces the total number of meetings and their duration. Online meetings conducted over Teams are reliable and of very high audio-video quality. As a result, employees spend less time addressing setup and call-quality issues, and more time interacting. The total time savings equal $6.9 million.

Information workers save 4 hours per week from improved collaboration and information sharing. With Teams features like co-authoring, integrated file storage, and internal directory, information workers can effectively and efficiently collaborate in real time. The potential savings equal more than $14.3 million.

Information workers save more than 1 hour per week by not having to switch between applications. Access to 3rd party and line-of-business apps inside Teams from any device benefits all workers, especially remote workers. This creates better employee cohesion and a common corporate culture across locations. The total savings are nearly $4.8 million.

Having resources available online in Teams reduces downtime by 14.6%. When resources are available in one cloud-based location, downtime is reduced and complexity is lowered, making security and compliance easier. Compared to on-premise solutions, the time savings are worth $258,000 across information and Firstline Workers.

Microsoft Teams empowers users to "collaborate with deeply integrated Office 365 apps." Organizations participating in the study provided many examples of improved collaboration freeing up time for information and firstline workers to focus on higher-value activities. Teams also gives users better access to people and resources to make smarter and faster decisions. Improved collaboration also provides various benefits around increasing employee satisfaction, helping in cross-generational understanding, and creating a common culture.
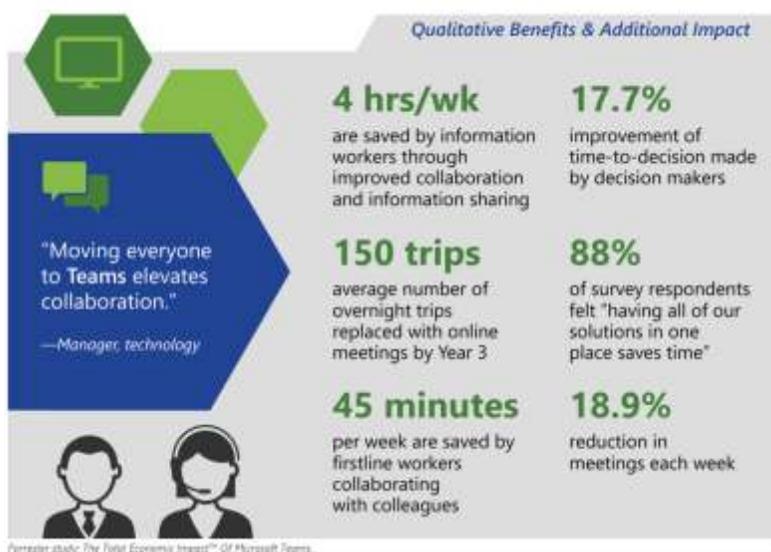
Companies reported significant time savings in collaboration activities by adding Teams to an existing Microsoft 365 implementation. This included time saved on coauthoring and version control and the time spent seeking out the right information and colleagues. Companies also reported a reduction in e-mails sent because users could request and share information in the Teams focused workspace using conversation threads.

The Teams platform enables users to customize and extend with third-party apps, processes, and devices. Teams is a central location where a user can access many features, information sources, and colleagues. Previously, users might have had to switch between various systems – Microsoft, other vendors, and in-house. With Teams, users save time and can be more effective.

As part of Microsoft 365, Teams provides a very high level of security, scalability, and availability. Team allows organizations to work with confidence with enterprise-level security, compliance, and manageability. Eighty-six percent of organizations that are using Teams as part of Microsoft 365 said that privacy controls were better that their previous solutions, and 84% said that it improves remote working security.

Microsoft Teams permits businesses to combine Office 365 tools such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Skype and SharePoint into a collaborative network. Employees can access files along with related chats and apps in one workplace. Teams provides threaded persistent chat that can be 1:1 or in groups. These can be on-line meetings, calls or web conferencing. Meetings can be recorded and automatically transcribed. Important files, apps or data can be pinned to the application for rapid access. There are third-party services that can be incorporated to customize Teams to fit industry segments.

SIM2K is glad to meet with you to discuss how implementing Teams might benefit your organization, and we can then source, install and support Teams as required. Call us for more information.

Qualitative Benefits & Additional Impact

4 hrs/wk are saved by information workers through improved collaboration and information sharing

17.7% improvement of time-to-decision made by decision makers

150 trips average number of overnight trips replaced with online meetings by Year 3

88% of survey respondents felt "having all of our solutions in one place saves time"

45 minutes per week are saved by firstline workers collaborating with colleagues

18.9% reduction in meetings each week

"Moving everyone to Teams elevates collaboration."
—Manager, technology

Forrester study: The Total Economic Impact™ Of Microsoft Teams.