

TECH REVIEW

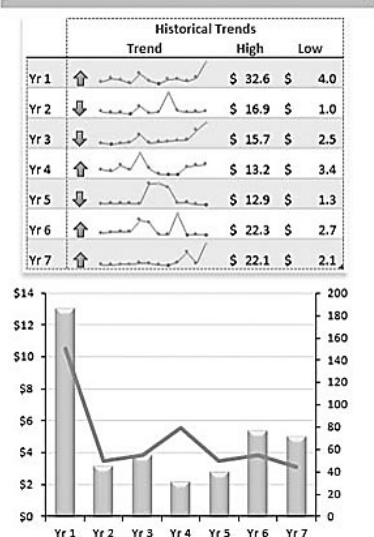
Microsoft Office 2010 Beta Gives a Glimpse of What's to Come

A more refined version of Microsoft Office, but nothing groundbreaking

SCORE CARD

EFFECTIVENESS	A
INTERFACE	C
USABILITY	C
INSTALLATION	B
OVERALL	C

Spreadsheet



NEW CELLS: With Sparklines in Excel 2010, you can take advantage of charts within a single cell. COURTESY OF MICROSOFT

By JOSHUA PHILIPP
Epoch Times Staff

Microsoft released its beta version of Microsoft Office 2010 this month, which can be downloaded for free. The widely-used office suite has received a few tweaks here and there, but there is very little that is actually new.

Microsoft Office includes a variety of applications for word processing, creating presentations, making charts, and so on. It remains one of the leading office suites and its various applications have a wide user-base.

It has been smooth sailing for Microsoft until recently. As free software and Web-based applications continue to rival its flagship products, the company may see trouble on the horizon in the coming year. The Microsoft Office suite, which has up until recently been a primary product for many users, is in a particular pinch as programs such as Google Docs begin to rev their engines for competition.

This is the challenge Microsoft faces as it prepares the next generation of Office. The 2010 release is its first full release since Office 2007—unless you factor in the Mac version in 2008—and frankly, not much has changed.

Keep in mind that this review is of the beta release of Office 2010 and not the final release, so there could still be some changes in the works. Still, the current beta should include the bulk of what's to come.

NEW IN OFFICE 2010

The most anticipated new feature in Office 2010 is its integration with the Web. Although details are still vague, along with Office 2010's desktop release, Microsoft will also release Web-based versions of applications including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and OneNote.

There is also a new feature that will allow multiple users to simultaneously work together on files over the Web. There are currently numerous free applications that do this,

such as EtherPad, but it's still nice to see this incorporated into Office. However, this feature was not available for use in the beta release.

Features for integration with mobile devices are also in the works.

Aside from that, it seems only a few other key features will be added. Excel 2010 has a new Sparklines tool that lets users place small charts in single cells. PowerPoint has new features for editing videos, such as fade-outs, the ability to rewind, fast-forward and pause during presentations, and the ability to embed videos from video sharing sites such as YouTube.

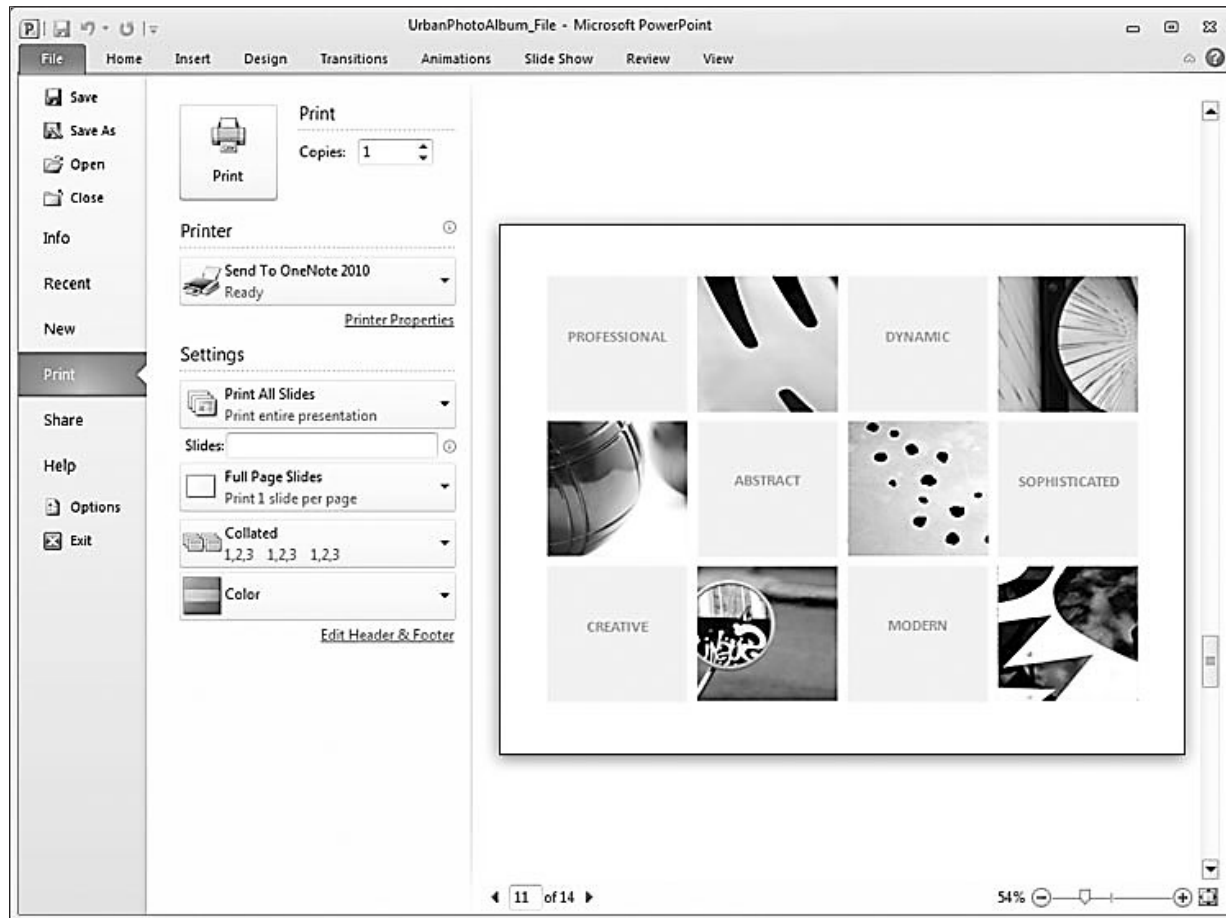
Very little has been changed with Word 2010. Updates include some new text options—offering more dimension through the use of shadows, glow, and reflection. They have also added a feature for pasting information into a document that will give a preview to gauge whether it will work and provides various options to make it work as intended.

Outlook 2010 has received the most work. The new Quick Steps feature lets users streamline their workflow a bit and also sort through e-mails. It lets users define common tasks, assign keyboard shortcuts, or perform tasks such as sending an e-mail to a manager, reply and delete, and so on. There is also a new sorting feature that is rather useful. If there is an ongoing e-mail thread, the user can choose to bring up all related e-mails to the thread.

OneNote 2010 and the rest of the applications appear to only have a few basic upgrades, and none of the applications have added anything major.

ROUGH WATERS AHEAD

Microsoft has not set out to reinvent Office with this release. It tried that with the 2007 release, and some users are still unhappy with the changes. In particular, many users did not like the Ribbon toolbar, and the .docx default file format for Word could not be opened in most other programs—including earlier versions of Office.



DIFFERENT LOOK: Backstage view in PowerPoint 2010. COURTESY OF MICROSOFT

Speaking of the ribbon feature, it is now included in every application in Office 2010—a move on Microsoft's part that some users will love and some will not. The menu places most of the program's tools in a bar across the top of the workspace. The upside of this setup is that all the tools are visible and quick to access. The downside is that it is bulky and some users have a hard time navigating it. It can be closed, but the user is then left with very little to work with.

So far, Office 2010 looks like a more refined version of 2007. There are no major updates, and it appears as if there is no major reason for current users to upgrade. Still, since this is a beta release, there could be some other surprises in the works.

The real key features in Office 2010 will be Web integration and allowing users to collaborate on projects online—but this is merely just Microsoft catching up with what others are already doing. Web-sites such as ZOHIO already offer Web-based applications at no cost, and other software such as Corel WordPerfect Office X4 also has similar online collaboration. In fact, there are many doing the same thing and several others still on the way.

Pricing is not yet announced, but it will be interesting to see what approach Microsoft takes with this one. Currently Office 2007 is one of the most expensive—if not the most expensive—office suite on the market, but with others looking to compete for its title, lowering the cost would

be a wise move on Microsoft's part.

IN A NUTSHELL

Aside from online integration, the bulk of the new features focus on making things look a bit better. If you currently don't use Office, you're probably better off staying with your current software, as there are many other programs available that can do the basics for a much better price or for free.

However, some users do need what Office can offer, as it is still among the most powerful office suites on the market. Whether the update is necessary really depends on whether you feel the graphic enhancements are worth it or if you feel the online collaboration tools would be useful enough to cover the cost.

Tech Holiday Buyer's Guide

Different gifts for different personalities

By JOSHUA PHILIPP
Epoch Times Staff

There are some people who are fairly difficult to find gifts for, particularly when it comes to gadgets and gizmos. People of different interests, different characters, and different lifestyles will want different gifts. With the help of this guide, hopefully finding a gift to make anyone's eyes sparkle will be easy.

THE ARTISTIC TYPE

They paint, they draw, they throw cats and water in the air and jump for photos. You know who they are. The artistic types want gifts that inspire their art. Below are a few gift ideas to help them further along their path.

TOON BOOM STUDIO

This is a computer program that allows anyone to create high-quality cartoons and animations. In addition to being able to make some nice animations, anyone who learns to use this software well will also have their foot in the door for some good animation jobs, since the technology is very similar to professional-grade software from the same company. Toon Boom also makes similar products for kids.

PRICE
\$249.99
WEB SITE
www.toonboom.com

THE SONY CYBER-SHOT DSC-W290

Behind every good artist is a good camera. Whether photography is their niche or if they want to capture a picture for a later painting or drawing, it never hurts to have a camera close by. This camera in particular is inexpensive, has a 12-megapixel resolution, and also sports High Definition (HD) video capture for making those on-the-go movies.

PRICE
\$229.99
WEB SITE
www.sonystyle.com



The Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W290. COURTESY OF SONY

THE COOL TYPE

They like what's in and they won't touch anything that isn't. This group is not always hard to find gifts for. Typically, whatever has the most commercials is what's cool, but there are some exceptions. Here are some tips to be sure your gift helps them keep that cool.

THE MOTOROLA DROID

It's cool. Let's face it. Although the iPhone is still arguably better in terms of function, the Droid is what's in for cell phones. Anyone who flashes one of these around knows what's happening.

PRICE
\$559.99
WEB SITE
www.motorola.com

LYNDA.COM SUBSCRIPTION

Why not turn that tech love into something useful? Lynda.com offers tutorials for just about every major brand of software on the market. With this helpful resource, anyone could conceivably learn to make Web sites, 3-D graphics, or make their own video games. This is a good ticket to a good career and also a good way for any entrepreneurs to get their start. The subjects are also fun to learn.

PRICE
6 month subscription \$125
WEB SITE
www.lynda.com



The Motorola Droid. COURTESY OF MOTOROLA

FLIP ULTRAHD

Cameras are so last year. Video is what's in now. With professional cameras adding video recording features and even cell phones joining in the mix, this pocket-sized HD video recorder is a sure crowd pleaser. It has a slick design, works well with video sharing sites such as YouTube, and records in 720p High Definition (HD) video quality.

PRICE
\$179.99 to \$199
WEB SITE
www.theflip.com

THE TECH TYPE

The tech type refers to those individuals who love computers and technology. They typically don't care too much about what the rest of the crowd is doing and have a good idea of what they think is the best. This group is often the most difficult to get gifts for because they're ahead of the game in the tech world, and not many people understand what they're talking about half the time.

THE IPHONE 3GS

Those who want to be hip will probably want the Motorola Droid, since it's currently the "in" thing. Those who know tech will most likely still want the iPhone though. The iPhone is still the most solid phone out there in terms of the features it offers. On that note, since there are two competing products in this category and since the Droid is rather new, competition between these two brands could yield some better deals in the works.

PRICE
Starting at \$199
WEB SITE
www.iphone.com



The iPhone 3GS. COURTESY OF APPLE