

Office 2000: Microsoft's Next Generation

The next generation of MS Office is a "must have" upgrade for any firm or law department that publishes to public or private Web pages—and by now, that should mean just about everyone. Office 2000 contains hundreds of enhancements that can be useful to those who still work primarily with "hard copy." There are minor improvements to every module that lawyers, secretaries and technical staff alike will appreciate. But the dramatic part is the deep Web integration.

Office 2000 turns every user into someone who can publish content to a Web page without knowing HTML, and without having to edit in

FrontPage or a specialized Web editor. Each component of the new Office can save data to HTML (with embedded XML) as an alternative native format. This means the documents can go "round trip." You can edit them in Word, Excel or PowerPoint; save as HTML; view in the browser; open in Word, Excel or

PowerPoint; make more edits; and save back as HTML. And you can do this without messing up

your formatting, fields, internal links and special functionality. Your documents look the same in your browser as they do in the program you used to create them!

We will leave it to others to review this new suite in depth. What follows is a brief description of the enhancements most significant to lawyers.

■ **Word 2000.** Other than Web integration, the functionality of Word 2000 is about the same as Word 97. The good news is that

documents don't need to be converted and users don't need to be retrained. And the upgrade fixes most of the bugs that were in Word 97. The only bad news is that it isn't any easier to number headings automatically when you want the heading and body text to be on the same line.

■ **Excel 2000.** You can save worksheets and workbooks to the Web in such a way that Office 2000 and Internet Explorer 5.0 users can access a Web page saved from Excel 2000 and perform calculations, generate graphs, create pivot tables, etc. Excel also is easier to use. For example, it's much easier to work with "pivot tables"—perhaps the most amazing

and underutilized feature of Excel. Introduced in Office 95, pivot tables let you analyze interactively a large amount of data in a way that feels dynamic and three-dimensional. You can rotate rows and columns, automatically run cross-tab totals and see your data from many different perspectives. You can analyze data in databases and on the Web. Try it. You'll like it.

■ **PowerPoint 2000.** PowerPoint 97 added the ability to work with different screen resolutions

without messing up screen shots (very important to anyone who incorporates screen shots captured on an XGA screen and displays on a Super VGA screen). PowerPoint 97 also added the ability to "save as" a Web-based presentation. PowerPoint 2000 improves both features. It reduces the risk and improves the results both on the Web and on unknown presentation screens.

The two most useful features for creating presentations are the ability to import an out-



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line from Word or a text file and the ability to view the outline in a frame on the left side of the screen. You can view a three-pane display as you work—with the outline, slides and notes displayed on the screen at the same time. Also new are Autofit, support for Animated .GIFs and other Web animation tools in your presentation, and built-in tables.

One trial lawyer we know uses a Powerpoint presentation in his opening statement to show what he will prove. He then uses the same presentation in his closing, interspersed with screen shots of the evidence, to show what he did prove. He calls this a "Powerpoint sandwich" and says he hasn't lost a case since he started doing it. Powerpoint 2000 is full of features that make it even easier to persuade a jury with your "Powerpoint sandwich."

■ **Access 2000 (Professional Edition).**

I long for the days when PFS:File and Q&A made it easy for any lawyer to build and use a database. Lotus Approach and others are much easier than Access to learn and use. But if you are a programmer or have made it through the Access learning curve, there's quite a lot to like in Access 2000.

Not surprisingly, from a features standpoint, the most significant change is the Web integration. There are dozens of ways in which you can make your databases dynamic on the Web (or your firm network) and accessible in a browser. Data Access Pages offer a powerful ability to access data in the browser, and Excel's "Pivot Tables" can be used in the browser to analyze data.

A dramatic technical change now allows Access users to use the new Microsoft Database Engine (MSDE) as an alternative format for an Access database. The name "Jet" for the MDB format was a joke from the beginning, because it was so slow. Performance of MDR files has improved through the years, but when an evidence database grows in size and needs to be shared, it really can bog down. And upsizing from an MDB to Microsoft SQL Server can take more time and expertise than many users have.

MSDE, the upscale alternative to the MDB format, offers three advantages: 1) It is fully compatible with SQL Server, so upscaling is much easier with SQL features such as "triggers" and "stored procedures"; 2) it is more

powerful and robust, so larger workgroups can share larger databases without having to move to SQL Server; and 3) enhanced replication features let you synchronize between the network and a home, laptop or regional office version of the data.

■ **Outlook.** Outlook is Microsoft's "personal information manager." It is a customizable e-mail, calendar, task list and Rolodex program that also serves as the front end to Microsoft Exchange Server.

Most lawyers who use Outlook have a love-hate relationship with it. There is much to love and much to be frustrated about. That hasn't changed. The biggest frustration always has been that it is not a case management system. While you can link it with an underlying case-oriented database, its inherent structure makes it difficult to work with a case-centered system the way lawyers want.

Nevertheless, there is much to like, especially when you have Microsoft Exchange Server as a back end, with public folders to share data among different users. I will mention the best new features in both Outlook 98 and Outlook 2000.

Outlook 98 added the important ability to create and view links between contacts, on the one hand, and appointments, tasks and messages, on the other. It would be better if you could create a link between anything and anything else, as with Commence, but the ability to link contacts is a good start. And you now can customize the first screen in Contacts.

The e-mail client is a delight to use. The improved Rules Wizard makes it quite easy to copy or move messages automatically into folders, or delete or forward them.

The most important and underused feature is the ability to create views of the data, with customized sorting, filtering, grouping and selection of items and fields in a dynamic, click-to-expand-and-collapse interface. An important feature most people have never even thought about using is the ability to use this dynamic Outlook interface to view Word and Excel documents. You can filter, sort and group by document properties. Outlook is not thought of as a document management system, but this works amazingly well for organizing documents. We add the client and matter number as a custom field to all Outlook

MICROSOFT OFFICE 2000 SITES

For more information, and links to even more, point your Web browser to:

- Microsoft Office
www.microsoft.com/office
- Microsoft Office Development
www.microsoft.com/office/dev
- Jim Eidelman's Web site
www.lawtech.com/office
- Woody's Office Watch
www.woodyswatch.com

items, making it much easier to work with in a law office setting.

The only dramatic enhancement in Outlook 2000 is the upgrade of the programming environment from VBScript to VBA (Visual Basic for Applications), the full programming language used to integrate and create macros in all other components of Office (now even WordPerfect). This won't affect most lawyers or staff, but is a Godsend to those who integrate and enhance Outlook.

■ **The extended family.** All software in the Microsoft Office family works together, works the same way with similar menus and toolbars, and can be programmed and integrated using Visual Basic for Applications and the Microsoft COM (Component Object Model) environment. Some of the software packages in the family are:

- 1) **FrontPage 2000** (for creating and managing Web sites and working with Web pages);
- 2) **Publisher 2000** (for desktop publishing, with new Web features);
- 3) **Photodraw 2000** (a new, surprisingly good, inexpensive package that combines the most commonly used features of packages like Adobe PhotoShop and Illustrator);
- 4) **Project 98** (a great tool for planning and budgeting a complex case or transaction, an office move or a network implementation). ■

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