



What's the Best Office Suite and Do You Need It?

ALTHOUGH WORDSTAR WAS A KEY PLAYER IN THE EARLY DAYS OF PERSONAL COMPUTERS, IT WAS DEFEATED BY THE MORE ROBUST WORDPERFECT IN THE MID-1980S AND THE MARKET HAS BELONGED TO MICROSOFT SINCE ABOUT 2000. CHANGE MAY BE COMING.

Microsoft Office, now called Microsoft 365, owns the office suite market. For now. Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access have enjoyed a 20-year run at the top, and it's unlikely that writers and editors will abandon Microsoft 365 anytime soon. The same is true for enterprises because inertia is hard to resist. Home and small business users may be harder to retain.

As large corporations began to install mainframe computers, an adage emerged: *Nobody ever gets fired for buying IBM.* That was true even though some people should have been fired for buying IBM. Even in the early days there was competition; Honeywell, Burroughs, NCR, Remington Rand, and others produced computers that would have been better fits for some tasks in some industries. IBM had mastered the FUD factor: Fear, uncertainty, and doubt.

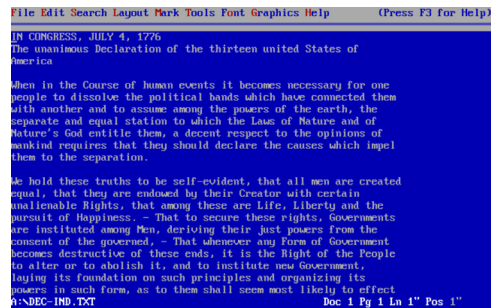
Microsoft: Best Choice?

MICROSOFT IS IN NEARLY THE SAME POSITION TODAY AND THE NEW ADAGE COULD BE *NOBODY EVER GETS FIRED FOR BUYING MICROSOFT.*

Microsoft offers system management tools that can be used by less experienced IT operators. Linux and Unix systems are more customizable and require considerably more knowledge. This is not to demean the talents of those who run Microsoft systems,

but only to acknowledge that not all members of a Microsoft IT team need the same knowledge, experience, and pay grade as the manager does.

Any enterprise that is tied to Microsoft Windows will almost certainly use the Microsoft 365 office suite. But home users, small businesses, and home offices could easily convert to one of the other office suites.



WORDPERFECT 5.1 FOR DOS OWNED THE WORD PROCESSOR MARKET UNTIL MICROSOFT TOOK IT AWAY.

Might WordPerfect be the once and future king? Doubtful. Perhaps OpenOffice or LibreOffice? Unlikely despite powerful features and free availability.

Microsoft 365 is actually a compelling bargain. Businesses pay \$6 to \$22 per month per user and home users get an even better deal—\$100 per year for two to six family members or \$70 per year for a single user.

Not everyone needs the full office suite, though. Those who need just a word processor could choose Google

Docs or even the free online version of Microsoft 365. Some features of the full version will be missing, but the free applications are adequate for many people.

I wrote this article in Word and stored the file on the local computer for later use in Adobe InDesign, but I could just as easily have written it in any other word processor, a text editor, or one of the online services. I could have stored the document on Google Drive or Microsoft OneDrive. Online storage offers the advantage of making documents available to my other computers, tablets, and even a phone.

Irony Alert

WAIT LONG ENOUGH AND THE PAST REPEATS ITSELF. THOSE WHO ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE PAST WILL THINK IT'S NEW.

In 1982, I was the advertising-marketing-PR-graphics person for a company that provided timesharing services on their Digital Equipment Corporation PDP 11/70 computers. Customers connected to the computers using dumb terminals and 300- or 1200-baud modems.

Some of the larger customers had their own PDP 11/70 or PDP 11/34 computers on-site. I recognized desktop computers as the future and told the owner we should investigate PCs that could run their own applica-

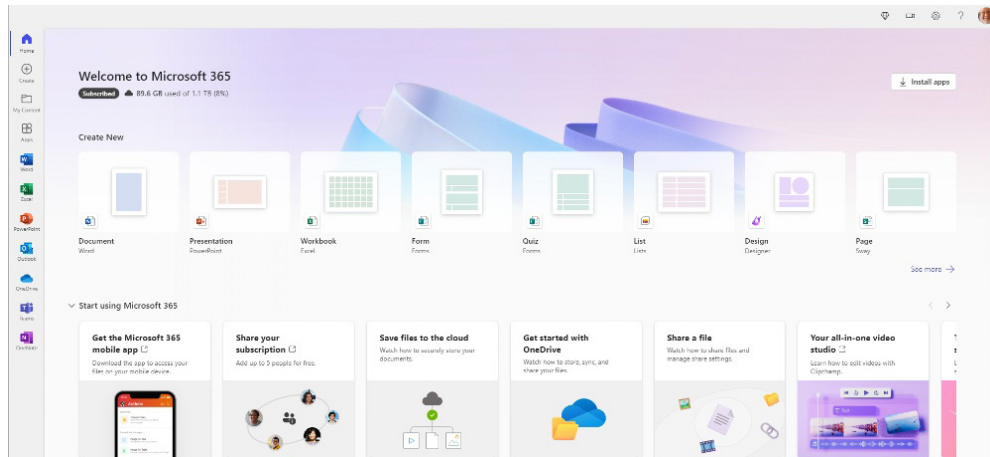
tions and connect to DEC computers using terminal emulation software. That resulted in changing my title to the advertising-marketing-PR-graphics-PC guy. Dumb terminals were replaced by desktop computers that could act as terminals and also had applications that could manipulate data from the accounting system.

Here We Go Again

NOW IT SEEMS LIKE A RERUN OF THE 1980s AS WE CONNECT ABSURDLY POWERFUL PERSONAL COMPUTERS TO ONLINE SERVICES.

There are differences, though. The connection speed, for example. Instead of being so slow that users could read faster than characters would appear on the screen, data moves fast enough to download a document that will take an hour to read in one or two seconds.

So we have choices. Lots of choices. Free open-source applications, free proprietary applications, paid proprietary applications, and even paid open-source applications.



MICROSOFT 365, LIBRE OFFICE, AND OPEN OFFICE ALL HAVE AN APPLICATION THAT DISPLAYS ALL OF THE COMPONENTS. GOOGLE'S APPS ALL APPEAR ON A WEB PAGE.

Some occupations all but require Microsoft applications. Editors, for example. Although other applications can read and write files in Microsoft Word format, the conversions are sometimes less than perfect. Anyone who's being paid to work on files that



A DEC VT100 DUMB TERMINAL SAT ON MY DESK UNTIL IT WAS REPLACED BY A ZENITH BRAND DESKTOP COMPUTER AROUND 1983.

will be used by others should probably stick with Microsoft.

There are other reasons to consider Microsoft: The Office suite includes features that the other suites don't: Outlook, OneNote, Publisher, Lens, and Microsoft To-Do. OpenOffice and LibreOffice have a database manager, but Corel's WordPerfect Office suite includes Paradox only in the pricier Pro version. None have equivalents of the other apps. Assuming the word processor, spreadsheet, and presenta-

tion applications all generally get the basics right, and they do, do the extras have any value?

I've never been a fan of Outlook, but it's the standard for enterprises. My preference is Thunderbird even though it doesn't integrate as well as Outlook does with the other suite applications.

OneNote is another good reason to consider Microsoft 365: None of the other suites has anything that corresponds to OneNote. Evernote is available in free and paid versions, but OneNote simply works better for most people.

And there's Microsoft Publisher. It's not a replacement for Adobe InDesign, but it's capable of handling simple newsletters and internal documents.

Regardless which you choose, the cost is likely to be lower than what you paid 20 or 30 years ago for a series of individual programs. The *value* of \$100 in 1982 equates to \$315 in 2023 dollars.

Many paid applications now use the subscription model, so the Microsoft 365 office suite will cost about \$1000 over a decade. You have to decide whether the value is worth the cost.

Some people are still using the DOS version of WordPerfect 5.1, which was released in 1989, on their Windows 11 computers. It was priced at \$295, the equivalent of \$723 today.

Would you be happy driving a 1989 Buick Century sedan? Perhaps a 1989 Mercedes-Benz S-Class 300SE sedan would be a better comparison with WordPerfect 5.1.

No matter how good these automobiles were in 1989, they would now be 34 years old and many key features would be absent. Ω

