

Microsoft Office 2010: Top Improvements and Disappointments for the Legal Profession

By Christel Burris

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Microsoft Office is essential for many law firms. But is the latest version — Microsoft Office 2010 — an essential upgrade? According to legal technology consultant and Microsoft Office trainer Christel Burris, it depends. In this TechnoFeature article, Christel discusses the top five improvements to Microsoft Office 2010 as well as the top three disappointments. If your law firm is considering an upgrade, Christel's analysis may help tip the balance one way or the other.

INTRODUCTION

I've been a fan of the Microsoft Office suite of products since the advent of Office 2003. Microsoft has brought the product line quite a long way since then. Case in point: TechnoLawyer asked me to report on the "top five improvements and disappointments" of Microsoft Office 2010. But after racking my brain and scrutinizing the product, I could only come up with three areas for improvement. After rigorous evaluation, I can say with confidence that Office 2010 should satisfy Microsoft fans and naysayers alike.

TOP FIVE IMPROVEMENTS

1. Loading Speed

After installing Office 2010 on my Dell Studio XPS, I first noticed the increased speed with which Outlook loads. I connect to an in-house Exchange 2003 server and my mailbox is approximately 350 MB in size. Outlook 2003 and 2007 took forever to load,

but Outlook 2010 boasts almost instantaneous loading. The other programs in the suite also load equally fast.

2. Customizable Ribbon

The customizable ribbon is one of my favorite additions to Office 2010. Most of my clients balked at moving to Office 2007 from Office 2003 because they had come to rely on highly customized installs — including toolbars, macros, templates, and menus specific to their firm — and didn't want to deal with third party add-ins to transition their customizations between versions. Happily, Office 2010 includes customization right out of the box. You can add as many or as few commands/tabs/groups as you like to the Ribbon, and easily create new tabs or add your own groups and commands.

3. Outlook now has the Ribbon

Outlook 2007 featured a "hybrid" Ribbon that only appeared in certain cases, such as creating an email or calendar item. The main Outlook 2007 window still featured the same clunky interface of Outlook 2003. But in Office 2010, the Ribbon now appears in all window views. I especially like the Unread/Read command in the Tags group on the Home tab.

4. Organizing Email by Conversation

While this feature has been available since at least Outlook 2003, Outlook 2010 extends the functionality. I love the ability to view a

conversation thread in one view, regardless of where I've stored conversation items. If you don't want those messages cluttering your inbox, you can remove yourself from a conversation by clicking Ignore in the Delete group on the Home tab. Doing so moves all current and future messages in that conversation to the Deleted Items folder (or you can redirect them a different folder). The Clean Up command (also found in the Delete group) "cleans up" all messages except the last message of a conversation. The remaining message will include all prior messages within it.

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5. File Tab (Backstage View) Replaces Microsoft Office Button

I for one am happy to say goodbye to the Microsoft Office Button. The File tab (referred to as the Backstage View) makes a lot more sense and boasts a seamless presentation. This view consists of three panes and — depending on the command you select on the left pane (e.g., Print) — presents two panes with information relevant to that command. In the case of Print, the middle pane displays options for printing (setting margins, choosing a printer, page ori-

entation, etc.). The right side pane displays a print preview. Return to your document simply by clicking one of the other tabs or clicking the File tab again.

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TOP THREE DISAPPOINTMENTS

1. Organizing Email by Conversation

You'll notice that this feature also appears in my "Improvements" list. While I like this feature, I wish it had more sophistication. Outlook 2010 organizes email conversations by subject line, meaning all messages with the same subject line get grouped in a conversation even though they have no relevance to each other.

Also, the interface makes it extremely easy to accidentally delete or clean up a conversation that includes relevant items that aren't really part of that conversation. Once I realized how easy it is to delete a "conversation" message, I created a separate folder for my "clean up" and "ignore conversation" commands to point to and implemented a policy on my mailbox that saves all deleted items for 30 days after I've deleted them from the Deleted Items folder.

2. Inability to Customize Pre-defined Groups on the Ribbon

As I mentioned in my "Improvements" section, I love the new customizable Ribbon. However, if you really want to "re-work" the tabs, you'll find it easier to create an entirely new tab rather than try to customize the existing tabs. While you can add groups to a built-in tab, Office 2010 does not enable you to customize pre-defined groups.

3. Microsoft Outlook Social Connector Provider for Facebook

After encountering this feature,

I just had to ask myself "Why"? More often than not, clients ask me to block access to Facebook, Twitter, etc. for certain employees, not enable it. While I am a recovering Facebook addict, I don't think this feature for Outlook Contacts benefits a law firm (though if you disagree, I'd love to hear your reasoning).

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CONCLUSION

The Microsoft Office 2010 suite is a major improvement on all earlier versions of the Office suites. In fact, it's so good, I'm guessing that many die-hard WordPerfect users will find something to embrace here.

Christel Burris has provided legal technology consulting and implementation to law firms of all sizes for over 25 years. She is CEO of [Push One Button, Inc.](#), a legal technology firm providing training, legal-specific technology, content development and consulting to businesses from California to the UK. Having started her legal career as a receptionist for a small law firm in San Francisco, she has held positions in law firms ranging from the previously mentioned receptionist to IT Manager (and everything in between). She understands how law firms work and how lawyers think.

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