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PILLAR



The Modern Office: ***Work Together. Wherever.***



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PANTHEON COMPUTERS

What Six Years Away Taught Me About What's Changed



Editor's Note

Jill Stagman
Editor-in-Chief

Pillar Magazine

In 2018, I stepped away from Pantheon to be home with my kids. When I came back in 2024, I walked into a different industry entirely.

When I left, "the office" meant on-premise Exchange, Small Business Server, and a shared drive everyone had learned to navigate by muscle memory more than logic. When I came back, the modern office had arrived — and I met it the way a kid meets a magic trick.

I remember the exact moment. I was working on a Word document with my business partner, Reyna, from home. We were both in the same file, at the same time, and I watched her edits appear on my screen in real time. I actually laughed out loud. It felt like magic. It also felt, if I'm honest, a little disorienting — I had spent years thinking of a document as a single thing that lived in one place, and here it was, alive, shared, and moving.

I won't pretend the shift from shared drives and file directories to a Teams environment was smooth for me. It wasn't. I was an old dog being asked to learn genuinely new tricks, and there were days I missed the simplicity of a folder I could point to. But I was excited, too — and once it clicked, it clicked hard. The collaboration inside Teams, the sense of connection through Viva, the way I could feel close to coworkers who were physically miles away — that was real. That wasn't a sales pitch. That was five years of remote and hybrid work quietly becoming not just possible, but good.

So here's what still catches me off guard: how many businesses we walk into today that haven't made that shift at all. On-premise Exchange. Outlook Web Access as the extent of “remote work.” No Teams. No real collaboration layer. The security exposure alone should be enough to change that — unpatched, unsupported infrastructure sitting on the open internet is a liability, full stop. But the quieter cost is productivity. It's the meetings that could have been a shared document. It's the version-control emails. It's the institutional knowledge trapped in someone's inbox instead of living in a searchable, shareable space the whole team can use.

If Teams and Microsoft 365 defined the last five years of the modern office, AI is going to define the next five — and I don't think most organizations have any idea how much runway they're leaving on the table. Most businesses we meet are using the tip of the iceberg: email, a calendar, maybe SharePoint. Loop, Forms, Viva, Power Automate, Copilot — the tools that turn Microsoft 365 from a place you store work into a place that does work — sit unused, licensed but untouched.

That's exactly what this issue of The Modern Office is about. We put together this magazine to walk through what's actually available inside the ecosystem most of you are already paying for — from the fundamentals of licensing and security, to the collaboration tools like Loop and Viva, to the automation and AI capabilities that are just starting to show what's possible. Whether you're the business that made the leap years ago or the one still running on-premise Exchange, I think you'll find something in these pages worth a second look.

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When Employees leave, does access stay?



WRITTEN BY:
CHASE GENT

Why offboarding is about more than turning off a login.

On Monday morning, a manager opened a client email and noticed a reply had been sent from Jordan's account. Jordan had left the company on Friday. Their login had been disabled - but a signed-in laptop still had access to email and project files.

Nothing malicious had happened. The offboarding step was simply incomplete.

ACCESS DOESN'T DISAPPEAR ON ITS OWN

When an employee leaves, their login may be disabled - but their access doesn't always end there. Active sessions, connected devices, and shared files can keep the door open.

That means a former emplyee could still read emails, access documents, or sync data - often without anyone knowing.

> **A login change is only the first step.**

BLOCKING A LOGIN ISN'T ENOUGH

Without a complete offboarding process, you risk:

- Unclosed Microsoft 365 sessions
- Orphaned mailboxes and files
- Missed messages and delayed work
- Compliance gaps and audit risks
- Licenses and access that go to waste

A consistent process protects sensitive information while keeping the business moving.

OFFBOARDING ISN'T ONE CLICK.

Close access, preserve the records, and keep the work moving.

Offboarding Map



SESSION END
End active Microsoft 365 sesssions and revoke access.

ROUTE THE WORK
Use shared access - not a former emplyee's passwords.

PRESERVE RECORDS
Save and retain important mail and files.

SET REVIEW DATE
Schedule reviews to keep access and data current.

DOCUMENT & REASSIGN
Update records, reassign access, and reclaim licenses.

THE MODERN OFFICE:

The Experience of the Remote Worker



WRITTEN BY:
NIKKI DULAS

When I tell people I work fully remote, I hear one of two things. Either “How lucky,” or “I could never.” Both hold some truth. Remote work is not right for every job, and it is not right for every person. For those of us it fits, though, it has become a genuinely good way to work.

My commute takes less than a minute. I walk from one part of my home into my dedicated office, open my laptop, and meet coworkers logging in from cities, states, and countries I may never visit. It is not a bad way to start a day.

I have worked fully remote for five years. Two weeks each year, I travel to our company’s physical office to spend time with the people I usually see through a screen. The rest of the year, my office is a room in my house, and it is where some of my most meaningful professional relationships live.

The Morning Huddle

My day begins before I officially log in. I check email and Microsoft Teams for whatever happened overnight. Client emergencies, sick calls, schedule changes, anything that might shape the hours ahead.

Once I am logged in, I update our paid time off report and join our morning company huddle in Teams. Starting the day together matters to us. We review who is out, share announcements and updates, talk through active emergencies, and remind everyone about upcoming deadlines. Some departments then break into smaller Teams rooms to cover their own specifics.

The rest of the day would be recognizable in any office. What is different is how we find one another. Instead of walking to someone’s desk, I send a Teams message. If the topic needs more room, we put a meeting on the calendar. The interaction is still there, and it still feels like teamwork.

Written Down So No One is Guessing

Remote work has made our communication more intentional. Without the visual cues of a shared office, we have learned to be deliberate about staying connected.

We are a team of 26, and everyone’s schedule is posted so we know when coworkers are on and when they are off. When schedules do not fully overlap, well written ticket notes, client records, Teams messages, and shared documents let the next person pick up right where the last one left off.

Tone can be harder to read in writing. One of our fully remote Service Coordinators told me she has learned to use emojis when she is assigning an urgent ticket or asking a coworker to take action. Without facial expressions or the sound of a voice, a short message can land more sharply than intended. An emoji seems like a small thing. It carries a lot of the warmth that would come naturally in person.

The Water Cooler

Working remotely does not mean spending the day alone at a computer. On our team, it does not feel that way.

Our morning huddle and department meetings give us regular chances to see and talk with one another. They exist to share information, but they also make space for conversation, jokes, and the everyday back and forth that helps people actually know each other.

We arrange in person lunches for local groups. Remote employees are invited to a virtual lunch once a month for games and casual conversation. We post daily Brain Break questions in Teams. And we have a channel called “The Water Cooler” that serves the same purpose as the one in a physical office. It is a place to stop by, tell a story, share something funny, or take a small break.

One of our Service Technicians put it best:

“Distance matters a lot less when you’ve built genuine relationships with the people on the other side of the screen.”

On Screen and In Person

Remote meetings are convenient. There is no travel involved, documents can be shared in an instant, and moving from one meeting to another does not require walking across a building.

Still, a virtual meeting does not feel exactly like sitting together in a room, and we do not pretend that it does. When one of our meetings includes both remote employees and people working from the physical office, everyone joins from their own computer. We do not put a group in a conference room while remote employees join through a single screen. That gives everyone equal access to the conversation, and it helps remote employees feel just as present as anyone else.

Even with that setup, some things are easier in person. Our fully remote Service Manager said larger virtual meetings can make it harder to read facial expressions and body language. Cameras may be off. Video windows may be small. The meetings still do what they need to do. They simply carry a little less of the nonverbal information that comes naturally when everyone is in the same room.

One of our Service Technicians said a good meeting comes down to a clear purpose, the right people bringing the right information, and real conversation instead of people talking at one another. He also mentioned that sometimes there is nothing quite like sitting across a table from someone with a cup of coffee.

The Home Office at 5:00

A common assumption about remote work is that working from home means completely flexible hours. That is not quite how it works on our team.

Our employees have defined schedules, and during work hours, remote employees are expected to be available and focused. Being at home does not automatically mean pausing to run a load of laundry, start dinner, or handle something for a family member. The home holds the workspace, but work time is still work time.

Remote employees also have to build their own boundaries at the end of the day, since there is no drive home to signal the switch. One of our Service Coordinators lets the team know when she is stepping away for lunch or heading offline. Outside of working hours, she turns off Teams notifications and turns her attention to her family. She goes to the gym with her husband, helps her son with homework and school activities, and makes sure she has time to rest.

My own stopping time depends on what needs to be done. Some days I finish long after others have logged off. Some days I finish right at 5:00. Occasionally I finish around 4:30 because I worked through lunch to wrap something up. Closing the laptop or walking out of the home office becomes the remote employee’s version of leaving the building. It is a small ritual, and it matters.



What “the Office” Means Now

I asked several of my remote coworkers what “the office” means to them now. Our Service Manager said:

“The office for me is my team. When they are working, the office is running, and I am there to support the office running.”

One Service Technician said the office is no longer one specific place. To him, it means having the tools, the environment, and the people needed to work well. Another said the office represents the company, its values, and the people who work there. Even though she works remotely all year, she still feels fully connected to the office because she feels fully connected to the people in it.

For our team, Microsoft Teams has become much of that shared space. It is where meetings, quick questions, department and project channels, and everyday conversation live. It does not replace the people or the physical office, but it gives coworkers in different locations a common place to work together.

Who It Fits

Remote work depends on both the job and the person.

Some tasks require someone to be physically present. Some of our employees need to be in the office, others spend time at client sites, and some roles can be handled almost entirely remotely.

Working remotely also asks something of the person. It calls for self-direction, comfort communicating in writing, and the discipline to keep a workday intentional when no one is watching the clock with you. Some people thrive in it. Others miss the energy of a shared physical space and the small human moments that come with it, and their preference is just as valid.

The person has to want it, and the work has to be something that can be done well outside the company’s main office.

Why I Still Come Back

Even though I work remotely most of the year, I look forward to my two weeks in the physical office.

One visit lines up with our employee appreciation event, where we cater a meal, play games, and spend time together outside our normal responsibilities. In the summer, I return for our annual Bean Bag Tournament. It is a tradition I started before moving across the country with my family and going fully remote, and coming back for it every year has become one of the highlights of my calendar.

Those visits let me strengthen relationships with coworkers I do not usually see in person. The connections built during that time carry right back into everyday work once everyone returns to their usual locations.

Working Apart, Working Together

The people I interviewed shared one thing in common. None of them felt that working remotely had cost them visibility or growth. One Service Coordinator said her role can be learned and developed without a permanent office presence. A Service Technician said remote work gives him the time and space to focus on his goals and keep building his skills. Another said it gives her more room to document what she has learned, expand her knowledge, and keep growing professionally.

Remote work does not remove the need for communication, relationships, teamwork, or professional development. It changes where and how those things happen, and for our team, they happen very well.

The office may have a physical address, but the experience of working there is no longer limited to the building.

Tips and Tricks for Working Remotely



Small, deliberate habits that keep a remote employee comfortable, productive, and steady over the long haul.

Working from home for the past five years has taught me that the difference between a good remote day and a rough one usually comes down to a handful of small habits. Not the flashy tools or the elaborate morning routines you read about online. The quiet things. How you set up your workspace. How you close your laptop at the end of the day. Whether you take a real lunch break.

I moved across the country with my family before going fully remote, and I have watched other remote employees settle in, thrive, and occasionally burn out. What follows is what I have learned about staying comfortable and productive when your office is also your home.

1 Build a Workspace You Actually Want to Sit In



- A supportive chair
- A real desk
- A monitor at eye level
- A keyboard you enjoy
- Good lighting
- A clear headset

A company laptop is not a workspace. If you plan to work from home for more than a few months, invest in the space. Your back will thank you and your focus will improve.

2 Give Your Day a Beginning and an End



Create simple routines to signal the start and end of your workday. Get ready, make coffee, and start at a consistent time. At the end of the day, close your tabs, tidy your desk, and shut your laptop.

3 Overcommunicate on Purpose



- Post updates when you finish something
- Let your team know when you're in focused work
- Share when priorities change
- Ask for help early if you're stuck

Written information is the closest thing a remote worker has to the hallway conversation.

4 Keep Your Calendar Honest



- Block time for focused work
- Post your regular working hours
- Mark lunch
- Show when you're out of office
- Update your status if plans change

When your calendar is accurate, coworkers can plan around you.

5 Speak Up in Meetings



- Turn your camera on when you can
- Ask questions
- Offer an opinion
- Say when something isn't clear
- If several coworkers are in one room, consider asking everyone to join from their own computers

6 Protect Your Focus



- Block time on your calendar for deep work
- Turn off non-urgent notifications
- Batch your responses
- Stop treating every message like it requires an answer within five minutes

7 Take. The. Break.



- Stand up and stretch
- Step Outside
- Eat lunch somewhere other than your desk
- A 20-minute walk can do more for your productivity than another cup of coffee

Your brain isn't designed to operate at full capacity for eight straight hours. Skipping breaks doesn't make you a better worker. It makes you a tired one.

8 Stay Connected to Your Coworkers



- Join the informal channel
- Go to the virtual lunch
- Ask about a coworker's weekend
- Celebrate wins
- Introduce yourself if you're new
- Shadow other departments

Remote work can get lonely. The fix isn't another productivity app. It's people. Coworkers who know each other as people work better together.

9 Raise Your Hand for Opportunities



- Raise your hand
- Volunteer for projects or training
- Tell your manager when you want to grow
- Share when your work helped make something possible

Being remote can sometimes mean being out of sight when new opportunities appear. Remote should never mean professionally invisible.

10 Keep Equipment Working



- Say something when equipment wears out
- Let your employer know if your headset cuts out or your chair is uncomfortable
- Don't wait until it becomes a bigger issue

Your employer can't see what you're working with. They can only respond to what you tell them.

11 Ask for the Context You Are Missing



- Ask that decisions from side conversations be captured in the shared workspace
- Keep documents where they belong
- Post questions in the channel when the answer might help someone else

When a decision gets made in a conversation you weren't part of, ask that it be documented. The written record is your version of walking past the conference room.

12 Take Care of Yourself



- Get enough sleep
- Exercise
- Set boundaries
- Make time for the people and things that matter outside of work

Remote work gives you flexibility, but it also requires intention. Take care of your physical and mental health so you can show up as your best self, both at work and at home.

Five years in, I still feel fortunate to work remotely. I have more time with my family, I sleep better, and I work in a space built around how I actually work. But none of that happened by accident.

Set up your space. Build your routines. Communicate clearly. Protect your focus. Take your breaks. Stay connected. Keep showing up.

Do those things consistently, and remote work can be both productive and genuinely good.



WRITTEN BY: NIKKI DULAS

Shadow IT

THE TOOLS YOUR TEAM IS ALREADY PAYING FOR TWICE

It usually starts small: a free Trello board to keep a project organized, a personal Zoom account because it's what someone used at their last job, a Dropbox folder to move files between home and the office. None of it feels like a security decision - it feels like getting work done.

But every one of those moments is Shadow IT: technology used inside your organization without IT's knowledge, approval, or oversight. And the uncomfortable truth for a lot of businesses is that the tool being smuggled in sometimes has a fully licensed, already-paid-for equivalent sitting unused inside Microsoft 365.

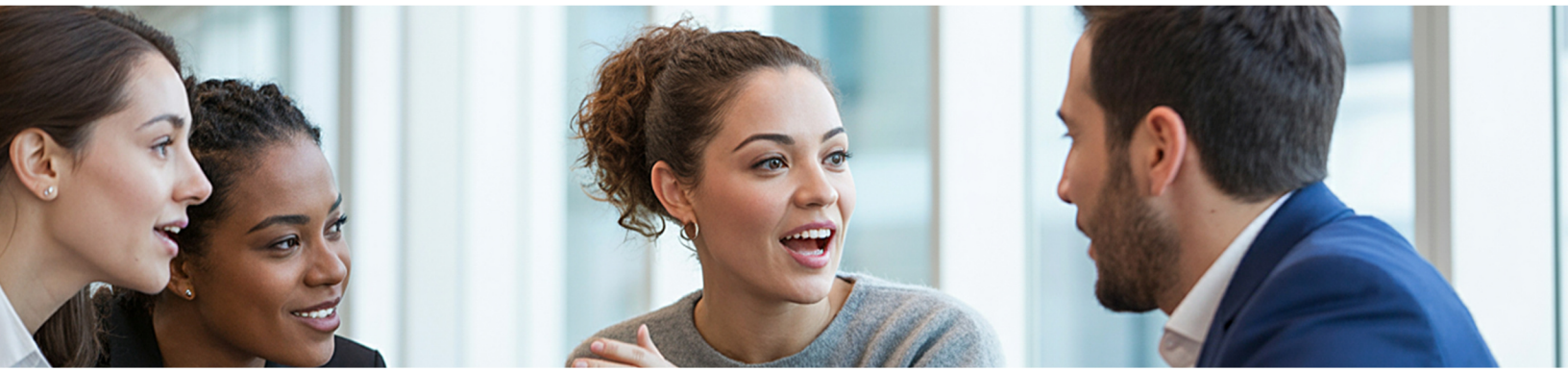


WRITTEN BY:
JILL STAGMAN

WHY IT HAPPENS

Shadow IT rarely comes from bad intent - it comes from a gap between what employees know is possible and what IT has communicated is available.

Most organizations use maybe 15% of their Microsoft 365 license: email, calendar, Word, Excel, Teams chat. Nobody told the team that Forms, Planner, Loop, Bookings, and Power Automate were already included, so when a need shows up, the fastest path is a Google search and a free-tier sign-up with a personal email address.



WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

Fragmented tools mean fragmented data and duplicate work. But the bigger issues are security and compliance:

- **Data leaves your control** - personal Dropbox or Google Drive files aren't covered by your backup, retention, or cyber insurance policies.
- **There's no offboarding** - when an employee using a personal Trello or Calendly account leaves, that data leaves with them, unnoticed.
- **It undermines your security stack** - MFA and conditional access don't apply to tools IT doesn't know exsist.
- **It breaks compliance postures** - for healthcare, financial, legal, and government clients, unsanctioned tools can turn into reportble incidents.
- **It shows up eventually anyway** - in a Security Score audit, if you're lucky, or in an incident report if you're not.

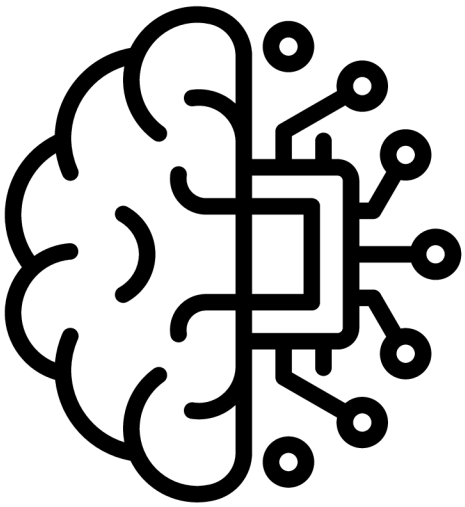
THE FIX MAY ALREADY BE LICENSED

Closing the gap rarely means buying something new - it means turning on and communicating what's already inside the license you're paying for.

Here's a side-by-side of the tools employees reach for most, and the Microsoft 365 product that already covers the same need:

CATEGORY	COMMON SHADOW IT TOOL	MICROSOFT 365 EQUIVALENT
Video meetings	Zoom, Google Meet, Webex	Teams Meetings
Chat / Messaging	Slack, Discord	Teams Chat
Phone system	RingCentral, Vonage, Grasshopper	Teams Phone
File storage & sync	Dropbox, Google Drive, Box	OneDrive / SharePoint
File Transfer	WeTransfer, personal file-share links	OneDrive / SharePoint link
Printing	Third-party print servers, PrinterLogic	Universal Print
Forms & surveys	Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, Typeform	Microsoft Forms
Task & project boards	Trello, Asana, Monday.com	Planner / Project for the Web
Wikis & notes	Notion, Confluence, Evernote	Loop / OneNote / SharePoint
Whiteboarding	Miro, Mural	Microsoft Whiteboard
Scheduling	Calendly, Acuity	Bookings / FindTime
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Remote Access	TeamViewer, AnyDesk (personal installs)	IT-managed remote tools
Employee pulse surverys	Officevibe, Culture Amp	Viva Glint / Viva Insights
Video training / hosting	YouTube, Vimeo	Stream
Quick video editing	CapCut, InShot, Kapwing, Canva Video	Clipchamp

THE BIG ONE:
SHADOW AI



Employees are already using AI at work, sanctioned or not — it's the fastest-growing, riskiest category of Shadow IT we see, and it's the one that deserves more than a row in a table.

A personal ChatGPT or Gemini account feels harmless in the moment: someone wants help drafting an email, summarizing a contract, or cleaning up a spreadsheet, and the free tool is one tab away. But every one of those prompts can carry client names, contract terms, patient information, or financial data into a service with no data processing agreement, no retention controls, and no visibility for IT.

For a healthcare, financial services, legal, or government client, that’s not a productivity shortcut - it’s a potential compliance incident with a paper trail that never touched a system IT monitors in the first place.

Microsoft Copilot exists specifically to close that gap. Licensed through Microsoft 365, it operates inside your existing security and compliance boundary — the same permissions, the same data governance, the same tenant — rather than sending information out to an unmanaged third party. The fix isn't telling employees to stop using AI. It's giving them a sanctioned version that does the same job without the data walking out the door.

GET AHEAD OF
THE PROBLEM

You can't secure what you can't see, and you can't redirect behavior you haven't acknowledged. The most effective response to Shadow IT isn't a memo banning outside tools — it's a combination of visibility and adoption: understanding what's actually being used across the organization, and giving people a genuinely good reason to use the sanctioned tool instead, because it's easier, not just because it's approved.

AUDIT WHAT’S OUT THERE

Regular reviews and Microsoft 365 Security Score checks surface the tools you don’t know you have.

COMMUNICATE WHAT YOU HAVE

Most teams don’t use what they don’t know exist.

MAKE IT EASY TO USE

Simple guides, templates, and champions go further than policy memos.

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Connecting AI with APIs

Automating the mind-numbing tasks



WRITTEN BY:
TATE BOHANNON



Most people's experience with AI is a simple text box. You type a question, you get an answer, you copy the answer somewhere else. That's all good and grand, but also a miniscule sample of what these tools can actually do. It's a bit like buying a pickup and never taking it out of the driveway – the capability is sitting right there, you're just using it to listen to the radio.

The interesting part starts when you connect it to everyday tasks: things you didn't even realize could be way easier and more predictable than the way it's already being done. That connection happens through APIs.

What exactly are APIs?

An API – or application programming interface – is a defined, refined way for two pieces of software to interact and talk with each other, without a human middleman. Your phone's weather app doesn't have a meteorologist on staff; it asks a weather service's API for the forecast and gets back a detailed, structured answer it can display at your fingertips. Your accounting software pulls transactions from your bank the same way. Nearly every piece of modern software is quietly talking to other software all day long.

APIs are boring in almost the best possible way. They're the plumbing. But plumbing is what turns a bucket of water into a building with running taps.

Two directions, and the second one is the big shift

When most people say “connecting AI with APIs,” they usually mean one of two things, and the difference is worth the separation.

Direction one: your software calls the AI: Your application sends text to an AI model’s API and gets a response back. This is how a company builds a support chatbot, an automatic email summarizer, or a tool that reads incoming documents or messages and pulls out the relevant fields. The AI is a service your software consumes, the same way it consumes a weather feed.

Direction two: the AI calls your software: This is newer, and it’s the one that takes the chatbot from a novelty to a teammate. Instead of just outputting text, the model can be given access to a set of tools. Those tools can range from customer records to inventory, ticket creation, calendar invites - you get the idea. The AI can then decide on its own which ones to use to accomplish a goal. You describe the tools; it figures out the sequence.

The API call is the easy part

Here's the thing that surprises people who try this for the first time: actually calling an AI API is trivial. It's a handful of lines of code. Any development team can have a working request running in an afternoon.

The hard parts are everywhere else.

Reliability: APIs can and will fail sometimes. Networks time out, services rate-limit you, and a request that has gone through a thousand times returns an error on the thousand-and-first. Anything running unattended needs to expect failure and handle it. That means retries, backoffs, and a plan for what happens when a step simply doesn't complete.

Unpredictable output. Traditional software is deterministic: the same input gives the same output every time. AI models are not. Ask for a summary twice and you'll get two slightly different summaries. On the surface that's fine when a human reads the result. It's a problem when the next step in an automated pipeline expects a specific format. Real systems constrain and validate the output rather than trusting it.

Orchestration. One API call is simple. Chaining six of them together – where step four seriously depends on step two, but step five costs money if it runs twice – is where the actual engineering lives. Most of the work in a working AI integration is the code between the API calls, not the calls at face value.

Permission and blast radius. The moment an AI system can take actions rather than just produce text, you have to think carefully about what it's allowed to touch. Reading data is low risk. Sending emails, modifying records, and spending money most definitely are not. Sensible integrations start read-only and earn their way up. Starting to sound like every other security conversation you've had with us?

What does this have to do with my business?

The practical question isn't "should we use AI." It's "where in our workflow is a human currently acting as an API?"

That's the honest way to spot opportunities, and it isn't an invitation for AI to take anyone's job. It's a doorway for people to spend more time on the human work. Anywhere someone is reading information out of one system, making a routine judgment, and typing it into another, there's a candidate. Categorizing incoming requests. Pulling details out of an email and into a form. Turning messy notes into a structured, readable record. Comparing a document against a list of requirements. Think of the person with five tabs open, aggressively switching between them – that's the shape of it. These are all tasks where the work is real but the judgment is narrow, and narrow judgment applied at volume is exactly what integrations are good at.

The tasks that don't fit are the ones requiring accountability, relationship, or genuine context: the parts of the job that were never really about moving data around in the first place.

The same thing that makes it powerful makes it risky

Every one of those hard parts traces back to a single trait: an integration does the same thing over and over without getting tired, distracted, or bored. That is the entire value proposition. It's also the entire risk, because a process that never gets tired also never stops to think, "huh, that's weird."

A person miscategorizing invoices catches it on the second or third one. An integration miscategorizing invoices will cheerfully do four hundred before anyone notices, and the fix isn't flipping a switch – it's untangling four hundred records. Scale cuts both directions, and it cuts fast.

Two more things worth keeping in the front of your mind. First, the model sounds exactly as confident when it's wrong as when it's right; there's no change in tone when it's guessing. Second, an API key has no judgment whatsoever. It does precisely what it has been permitted to do, every time it's asked, including when the thing asking is a document or an email that someone else wrote. Anything your AI reads is something that can try to steer it.



The practical response isn't to lock everything down and walk away. It's the same discipline you'd apply to any account with access to your systems: give it the narrowest permissions that let it do the job, log what it actually did, keep a human on the irreversible steps, and make sure you can answer “what did this thing touch yesterday?” without a forensic investigation. Do that, and the speed becomes an asset instead of a liability.

Start Small

The failure mode with this technology isn't building something that doesn't work. It's building something ambitious that nobody trusts enough to use.

A better path: pick one narrow, annoying, repetitive task. Automate just that. Keep a human reviewing the output for a while. Measure whether it's actually saving time or just moving the work somewhere less visible. Then build off of that.

The organizations getting real value out of AI right now mostly aren't the ones with the most impressive demos, or the ones trying to sell you their model, or the ones that have gone all-in on replacing people. They're the ones who connected a model to one boring internal system, got it working reliably, and then did it again.

That's what connecting AI with APIs actually looks like in practice. Less science fiction, more plumbing – and plumbing is what makes the mundane look magical.

MICROSOFT SECURE SCORE

WRITTEN BY: JOSH BURSTON



What does your number really mean?

If you've ever looked at your organization's Microsoft Secure Score and thought, **"Is that good or bad?"** you're not alone.

Microsoft Secure Score provides a helpful way to evaluate security within your Microsoft 365 environment. It identifies recommended security improvements, awards points for certain protections, and gives you a percentage representing the controls Microsoft can evaluate.

But there's an important distinction: your Microsoft Secure Score is not necessarily your organization's overall security score.

A lower number doesn't automatically mean your organization has poor security, just as a higher number doesn't guarantee that you're completely protected. Understanding what goes into the score—and what doesn't—is what makes it useful.

YOUR NUMBER IS A CLUE, NOT A CONCLUSION.

START WITH THE ROADMAP

What is Secure Score?

Think of Secure Score as a security checklist built into Microsoft 365.

Microsoft evaluates supported security settings and recommends actions that could help protect your users, identities, devices, applications, and data. As applicable recommendations are implemented, points are added to your Secure Score.

Rather than treating the percentage as a grade, we recommend thinking of it as a roadmap. It helps identify areas worth reviewing and provides a way to track improvements over time.

What Affects Your Score?

There are many factors that can influence Microsoft Secure Score, and recommendations can change as Microsoft's products and security guidance evolve. Some common areas include:

- **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)**
  Stronger, phishing-resistant sign-in methods can help.
- **Email Security**
  Phishing, malicious links, and unsafe attachment protections.
- **Administrator Access**
  Least privilege reduces unnecessary risk.
- **Identity, Apps & Devices**
  Evaluation depends on your Microsoft licenses and products.

WHY YOUR SECURE SCORE MAY NOT TELL THE WHOLE STORY



Microsoft can show you useful signals - but the number needs context.

> **"That doesn't make Secure Score inaccurate - it means the score needs to be interpreted in context."**

Microsoft Secure Score primarily measures security controls that Microsoft can see and evaluate. Your organization may also use security products and services outside Microsoft's ecosystem.

For example, an organization might use a third-party email security platform, endpoint protection solution, DNS filtering service, or other security technology. Those protections may substantially improve the organization's real-world security posture without necessarily giving Microsoft enough visibility to award Secure Score points for them.

In other cases, a Microsoft recommendation may not be appropriate because another security control already addresses that particular risk.

That doesn't make Secure Score inaccurate—it means the score needs to be interpreted in context.

Don't Chase the Number

The goal shouldn't be to reach 100%.

Implementing a recommendation solely because it adds points can create unnecessary restrictions without meaningfully improving security. Every organization has different technology, workflows, licensing, risks, and business requirements.

Instead, each recommendation should prompt a conversation:

What risk is Microsoft identifying? Do we already have something protecting us from it? If not, would implementing this recommendation make us more secure?

Those questions are much more valuable than the number itself.

A Score Is a Starting Point

Microsoft Secure Score is a valuable tool because it gives organizations another way to identify potential security gaps and measure progress. But like any security tool, it works best when combined with the bigger picture.

At Pantheon, we look beyond the percentage. We consider the protections already in place, the risks facing the organization, and which recommendations can provide meaningful improvements.

Your Secure Score doesn't need to be perfect. **What matters is understanding why your score is what it is—and making sure the security behind that number is protecting your organization.**

More Information
www.pantheoncomputers.com

Our Phone
507-718-4288

BUSINESS OWNER'S PERSPECTIVE

The Modern Office Needs Grownups - Including Us

Remote work did not eliminate accountability, culture, or management. It forced us to stop relying on proximity and start building all three on purpose.

ACCOUNTABILITY

CULTURE

MANAGEMENT

We don't get them from proximity anymore.

We have to build them on purpose.



WRITTEN BY:
REYNA MONSON



Before COVID, our Waseca office was bursting at the seams. We had people everywhere. At one point, we even had cubicles set up in the kitchen.

It was loud. It was chaotic. And it was full of energetic camaraderie.

You could hear technicians helping each other across the room. Someone was always telling a story, asking a question, or giving someone else a hard time. People debated the latest sports news over lunch. They built LEGO sets in the break room. (The team was especially proud of our Millennium Falcon.)

It was not quiet, and it was definitely not elegant. But it felt alive.

Then COVID arrived, and almost overnight, the building emptied. I spent months working there alone. The same office that had once felt like it could barely contain us suddenly felt enormous.

Eventually, people came back—but work did not go back to the way it was.

Instead, the modern office arrived. Some people returned full-time. Some went hybrid. Some stayed home. Our team was spread across cities and states. Meetings moved online. The informal ways we had always understood what was happening inside the company disappeared.

And everything changed.

How Do We Even Know They Are Working?

That was one of the biggest questions owners and managers wrestled with in the beginning. If I cannot see someone at a desk, how do I know they are working?

It is an understandable question. In a traditional office, managers could walk through the building and get a feel for the day. We could see who was busy, who was overwhelmed, who was helping someone else, and who seemed to be accomplishing absolutely nothing.

Was that feeling always accurate? Probably not. Someone staring intensely at a spreadsheet may have been working on a financial model—or planning a fantasy football draft. But visibility gave us a sense of control.

The modern office took that feeling away.

Suddenly, we did not know who was doing what, or where. Team cohesiveness stopped being a natural byproduct of proximity. Attendance, productivity, supervision, communication—everything we had been taught to rely on was called into question.

So solutions came out of the woodwork.

Require everyone to keep their camera on. Install monitoring software on employee computers. Track keystrokes. Watch online-status indicators. Bring everyone back as quickly as possible, even if it means a hybrid schedule, because seeing people sometimes must be better than never seeing them at all.

Employees hated these solutions. Of course they did. They felt untrusted and micromanaged. They felt like they were being treated like children.

The uncomfortable part is that a few of them were behaving like children.

The World's Most Elaborate Cup of Tea

I once had a technician the rest of the team constantly complained about. They could not reach him when they needed him. They felt like he was not carrying his weight. Work was falling onto other people, which is usually where an individual performance problem becomes a team culture problem.

So I started looking closely at his ticket time entries.

I noticed a pattern. Every time he went to "make a cup of tea," there was a 30- to 40-minute hole in his day. This happened multiple times a day.

Even the most bougie tea drinker in the world does not need that much time.

I tried to work with him. We created time-management strategies. We added more accountability. We paired him with a senior technician. We gave him support and opportunities to improve.

Nothing worked.

Eventually, I had to fire him. He simply could not handle working from home.

It only takes one or two experiences like that before owners and managers start to feel burned by the modern office. We start writing policies for the worst employee we ever had. We start treating everyone like the person who disappeared several times a day to harvest tea leaves in the Himalayas.

But managing every good employee as if they are the bad one is not leadership. It is fear with a policy attached.







Besides, the dam is broken. There is no putting the water back.

The modern office is here. We can complain about it, resist it, or build increasingly sophisticated ways to pretend it never happened. None of that changes reality.

Yes, plenty of tools make distributed work possible. Microsoft 365, file-sharing platforms, Zoom, Teams, Slack, project-management systems—the list keeps growing. These tools solve important operational and technical problems.

They do not solve the human problem: How do employees and managers work together when proximity no longer does part of the managing for us?

Here is what I have learned from my own mistakes, from leading teams, and from working with clients through the same challenges.

Only Allow Grownups on Your Team

The modern office requires more self-accountability and self-motivation than the traditional office did. Not everyone can handle that.

That does not necessarily make someone lazy or bad. Some people genuinely perform better with the structure, routine, and social energy of a physical workplace. But if a role requires someone to work independently and that person repeatedly proves unable to do it, no amount of surveillance will transform the situation into a healthy employment relationship.

You can add check-ins, clarify expectations, coach time management, provide better tools, and offer support. *You should do those things. But at some point, you have to decide whether the employee can meet the demands of the job. In other words, when they show you what kind of employee they are, believe them.*

If you keep lowering the standard and adding controls to compensate for someone who refuses to manage themselves (i.e. baby them through it), you will become a babysitter. I have never met a manager whose career aspiration was "full-time adult babysitter."

We spend an extraordinary amount of our lives with coworkers. Many weeks, we spend more waking hours with them than with our friends or family. Employees do not get to choose the people on their team. Owners and managers do.

For everyone's sake, choose grownups.

Accountability Has to Look Different

In the modern office, results have to matter more than visible effort.

This is more difficult for managers than we like to admit. We are comfortable rewarding the behaviors we can see: arriving early, staying late, looking busy, being constantly available. But none of those things automatically create value.

Working hard is not the same thing as succeeding.



Success is producing the output that allows the client, the team, and the company to thrive. That output can—and must—be measured.

Every person should know what they own. They should know what success looks like, when the work is due, and how its quality will be judged. That means clear goals, meaningful KPIs, deadlines, response-time expectations, and regular conversations about performance. Not 47 KPIs assembled into a dashboard no human being understands. A small number of useful measures tied to the actual value of the role. (Not activity metrics that reward motion instead of progress.)

This also requires managers to become more flexible. Value does not always equal time. One employee may solve a difficult problem in two hours that takes someone else all day. A highly experienced person may create enormous value without looking frantic while doing it. If the result is excellent and the commitments are being met, we should not punish efficiency because it does not resemble our old picture of hard work.

Pay people fairly for the value they produce. Give them reasonable freedom in how they produce it. Then assess the result honestly.

But you have to assess it. Trust is not the absence of accountability. Without goals, KPIs, deadlines, and honest feedback, you are not empowering people. You are just hoping they are not making fancy tea.

Create Culture Intentionally

Culture used to happen while we were doing other things.

People joked in the lunchroom. They walked to a coworker's desk to ask a question and stayed to talk about the weekend. They decided to grab a drink after work. They built a LEGO Millennium Falcon in the break room.

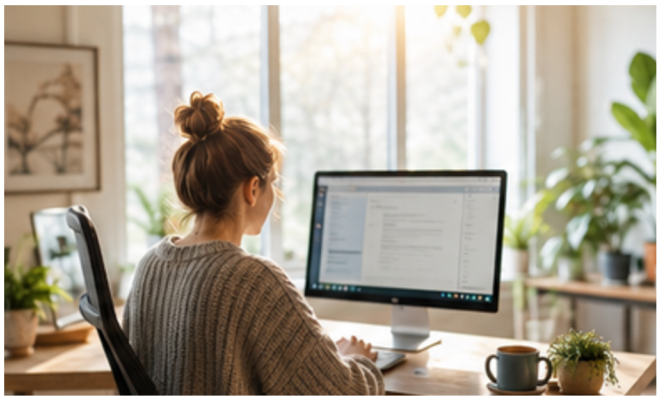
Those tiny interactions accumulated. They created relationships, inside jokes, trust, and a shared sense of identity. We did not schedule those things or measure them. Proximity did much of the work for us.

Now culture has to be created intentionally.

That does not mean trying to force the old office into the new one. After the modern office arrived, my boss tried hard to revive culture the way we had always done it. He would put a huge amount of effort into a barbecue or another in-person event, and very few people would come.

It drove him nuts.

But things had fundamentally changed. Trying to fight that was a losing battle—like trying to wipe out the Rebel Alliance. It was never going to work.



The goal of culture has not changed. We still want a positive work environment where people trust one another, enjoy working together, and feel that they belong. The means to that end has to look different.

Sometimes it looks like a nonsense Teams or Slack channel full of memes and ridiculous stories. Sometimes it is an online game played over lunch. (We use CrowdParty, and there are plenty of other options.) Sometimes it means giving people permission to talk about something that is not on a project plan.

Most importantly, it means being willing to intentionally "waste" time.

Every Friday, our whole company joins a Teams meeting for 30 to 40 minutes. We spend part of it thanking one another for things that happened during the week: "I want to give kudos to Nikki for rearranging my schedule on Wednesday when I had to call out."

Then someone asks a popcorn question—something everyone can answer quickly. As I write this, today's question was: If you had an extra three hours every day and money were no object, what hobby would you spend those hours doing? It had to be a hobby, and you had to do it for all three hours.

The answers included skydiving, playing Dungeons & Dragons, gardening, and everything in between. We learned a little more about one another, and we laughed a lot.

I do not even want to calculate what that meeting costs. Across the whole company, it is thousands of dollars.

I also do not consider it a waste.

It strengthens the team. It reduces isolation. It gives people a chance to be seen as human beings rather than names on a screen. It sets a tone for the company that cannot be fully valued in dollars—but absolutely shows up in retention, cooperation, and the way people treat one another when work gets difficult.

Culture takes time. If we refuse to spend any time on it because it is not "productive", we should not be surprised when we do not have a positive one.

The People Who Need Retraining Are Us

Employees had to learn how to work in the modern office. Owners and managers have to learn how to lead in it.

Many of us were trained—formally or informally—to manage a traditional office. We learned to associate attendance with commitment, visibility with productivity, and supervision with control. We learned to read the room because there was a room to read.

That room is gone.

We have to replace instinct with clarity. We have to communicate expectations instead of assuming people absorbed them by being nearby. We have to evaluate outcomes instead of

admiring activity. We have to create connection instead of waiting for the lunchroom to do it. And we have to address poor performance directly instead of using invasive policies to avoid a difficult conversation with one employee.

This is not easy. Some people love the new rhythm of work. Some hate it. Most of us like parts of it and struggle with others.

But refusing to change is not a neutral position. If we do not learn how to lead in the modern office, our teams will not thrive. Teams that do not thrive are less productive, less efficient, less connected, and more likely to lose good people—the exact outcomes managers are supposed to prevent.

Ultimately, refusing to change is to fail our team, our company, and ourselves.

The modern office is here to stay. It needs employees who can handle freedom responsibly. It needs accountability based on meaningful results. It needs culture built for the way people work now, not the way they worked in 2019.

And it needs owners and managers willing to become grownups too: to release the illusion of control, have honest conversations, set clear standards, and lead the office we actually have.

It is up to us to make it the best modern office it can be.



MICROSOFT 365 RETENTION:

WHAT IT DOES - AND WHAT IT DOESN'T



It was a busy Friday afternoon when an employee cleaned out their inbox and deleted an email thread they thought they no loner needed. A few weeks later, the team needed the signed approval attached to that conversation. By then, the email had been emptied from Deleted Items - and no one was sure whether it could still be recovered.

Situations like this are more common than most organizations realize. Microsoft 365 provides helpful recovery and retention features, but those features have limits and depend on how the environmnet is configured.

RETENTION AND BACKUP ARE NOT THE SAME THING.

An independent Microsoft 365 backup creates another recoverable copy of important business information.

WHEN THE WINDOW CLOSES

Permanently deleted Exchange Online email is kept for 14 days by default, or up to 30 days when configured. Deleted OneDrive and SharePoint files are generally available for up to 93 days from original deletion. After the applicable window expires or content is purged, recovery may no longer be availble.

THE BACKUP ADVANTAGE

A separate backup gives your organization another recovery option if important information is no longer available in its original location.

If the original disappears, another copy may still exist.

A QUICK RECOVERY CHECK

WHAT IS COVERED?
Know which mailboxes, files, sites, and Teams data are included.

HOW LONG?
Review recovery windows and the retention policies applied to your organization.

WHO CAN RESTORE?
Make sure the right people know how to request or perform a recovery.

A recovery plan is strongest when it is reviewed before an urgent need arises.

BACKUP ≠ RETENTION

They both protect information. They just do it differently.

Microsoft 365 includes tools such as retention policies, deleted-item recovery, and other data-protection capabilities. Those tools are valuable parts of a properly configured Microsoft 365 environment. But they are designed for different purposes than an independent backup.

Think of your Microsoft 365 environment like an important filing cabinet.

RETENTION

Microsoft's built-in protections help keep the cabinet reliable.

They can determine how certain information is retained, how long items remain available, and what recovery options exist within the environment.



VS

BACKUP

A separate backup is more like keeping another protected copy somewhere else.

If something happens to the information in the original cabinet, you are not relying exclusively on that one location to recover it.



One does not automatically replace the other. Together, however, they can create a stronger approach to protecting important business information.

BACKUP PROTECTS MORE THAN YOUR INBOX

Depending on the solution, Microsoft 365 backup may protect:

EXCHANGE ONLINE
Email and attachments

ONEDRIVE
Files and folders

SHAREPOINT
Shared business documents

MICROSOFT TEAMS
Collaboration data

CALENDARS
Meetings and appointments

CONTACTS
Important contact records

YOUR INBOX MAY HOLD YEARS OF YOUR BUSINESS

Email stopped being "just email" a long time ago.

Inside the average business inbox are records of decisions, customer conversations, approvals, transactions, project histories, attachments, agreements, and relationships built over years.

OneDrive, SharePoint, and Teams have become just as important.

Together, Microsoft 365 often contains a remarkable amount of an organization's institutional knowledge.

Protecting that information is not about assuming disaster is around the corner.

It is about making sure your organization has options when something happens.

WRITTEN BY:
JUAN STANDLER



Microsoft 365 Licensing:

A Practical Guide

WRITTEN BY:
SETH PRESCHER



Microsoft 365 licensing can feel complicated. The goal isn't simply to choose the cheapest plan - it's to find the right combination of productivity, security, and management tools for the people who actually need them.

The key distinction:
Office 365 plans focus on productivity and cloud services. Microsoft 365 plans can add Windows, device management, identity protection, and broader security controls.

BUSINESS PLANS FOR SMALL & MIDSIZE ORGANIZATIONS

Microsoft's Business family supports up to 300 users per tenant. It's the right starting place for organizations that need email, collaboration, Office applications, and security without the complexity of enterprise licensing.

BUSINESS BASIC

Cloud-first productivity

INCLUDES
Web/mobile apps; buiness email; Teams; OneDrive; SharePoint

BEST FOR
Cloud-first users, shared workstations, or staff who do not need desktop Office

WATCH FOR
No desktop Office apps; limited security and device-management depth

BUSINESS STANDARD

Everyday productivity

INCLUDES
Everything in Basic plus installed desktop Office apps

BEST FOR
Productivity focused workers in small and midsize businesses

WATCH FOR
Security remains lighter than premium; endpoint controls may require add-ons

BUSINESS PREMIUM

Productivity + stronger security

INCLUDES
Standard plus advanced identity, endpoint management, and threat protection

BEST FOR
Organizations that want productivity and a strong security baseline in one bundle

WATCH FOR
300-user limit; advanced enterprise compliance may still require E5-class capabilities

APPS FOR BUSINESS

Apps only

INCLUDES
Desktop Office apps and One Drive; no hosted email or Teams bundle

BEST FOR
Users who already have email/collaboration elsewhere

WATCH FOR
Not a complete Microsoft 365 workplace license

ENTERPRISE AND OFFICE 365

Enterprise licensing removes the 300-user cap and offers deeper storage, compliance, analytics, identity, and security capabilities. Office 365 E-plans emphasize productivity services; Microsoft 365 E-plans combine productivity with Windows Enterprise and enterprise mobility/security components.

IMPORTANT 2026 CHANGE

Microsoft's commercial pricing updates took effect July 1, 2026, with new packaging features rolling out during 2026. Existing customers generally move to new pricing at their first renewal after that date. Teams and no-Teams variants remain available in applicable markets and agreements.

Choose by Role, Not by Company



The cheapest license is not always the lowest-cost outcome. A plan that omits identity, endpoint, backup, compliance, or threat protection may shift cost into separate products and management overhead.

The better question is: which license creates the required business and security outcome with the least duplication?

BUSINESS REQUIREMENT	LIKELY STARTING POINT
Needs desktop, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook	Business Standard, Business Premium, Office 365 E3/E5, Microsoft 365 E3/E5/E7, or Apps plans
Needs hosted email and collaboration but not desktop apps	Business Basic or Office 365 E1
Needs managed Windows devices and a strong SMB security baseline	Business Premium
Needs enterprise Windows, Intune, and identity/device management	Mircosoft 365 E3
Needs advanced threat protection, compliance, analytics, or voice	Office 365 E5 or Microsoft 365 E5
Needs task-worker or kiosk licensing	Microsoft 365 F1 or F3
Needs only installed Office applications	Apps for Business or Apps for Enterprise

COMMON ADD-ONS TO CONSIDER

Copilot

AI assistance across Microsoft 365 apps and organizational data

Teams Phone

Cloud PBX and calling capabilities

Power BI Pro

Business intelligence, sharing, and advanced analytics.

Visio / Project

Specialized diagramming and project-management capabilities.

Security

Targeted security, identity, endpoint, and compliance capabilities.

Microsoft 365 Business Plan Comparison

PANTHEON COMPUTERS

Microsoft tool or service	Business Basic Web & mobile apps with email	Apps for business Desktop apps only, no email	Business Standard Desktop apps with email	Business Premium Standard plus security & device management
OFFICE APPLICATIONS — HOW EACH APP IS DELIVERED				
Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote	Web & mobile	Desktop + web	Desktop + web	Desktop + web
Outlook	Web & mobile	Desktop	Desktop + web	Desktop + web
Access — Windows PC only	—	✓	✓	✓
Visio for the web	Web	—	Web	Web
Installs for 5 PCs or Macs, 5 Tables and 5 Phones	None			
EMAIL, CALENDAR & SCHEDULING				
Exchange Online business email — 100 GB mailbox per user	✓	—	✓	✓
Email archive storage	50 GB	—	50 GB	1.5 TB
Outlook web & mobile	✓	—	✓	✓
Microsoft Bookings & Shifts	✓	—	✓	✓
COLLABORATION & COMMUNICATION				
Microsoft Teams — chat, calls, meetings	✓	—	✓	✓
Teams webinars with registration & reporting	—	—	✓	✓
Teams Audio Conferencing dial-in	Add-on	—	Add-on	Add-on
SharePoint team sites	✓	—	✓	✓
OneDrive cloud storage — 1 TB per user	✓	✓	✓	✓
Microsoft Loop workspaces	—	—	✓	✓
Clipchamp video editing	—	—	✓	✓
Planner, To Do, Lists & Forms	✓	—	✓	✓
Sway	✓	—	✓	✓
Viva Engage, Insights & Learning	Limited	—	Limited	Limited
Microsoft Search	✓	—	✓	✓
AI & AUTOMATION				
Microsoft 365 Copilot Chat	✓	—	✓	✓
Microsoft 365 Copilot in Word, Excel, Outlook	Add-on	—	Add-on	Add-on
Power Apps for Microsoft 365	✓	—	✓	✓
Power Automate for Microsoft 365	Cloud flows	—	Cloud flows	✓
Microsoft Graph unified API	✓	—	✓	✓

Not sure which license fits your team? Pantheon Computers will map your users to the right mix — licenses can be assigned tier by tier, role by role. Feature availability reflects Microsoft's published business plan lineup as of September 2026 and is subject to change.

Microsoft 365 Business Plan Comparison

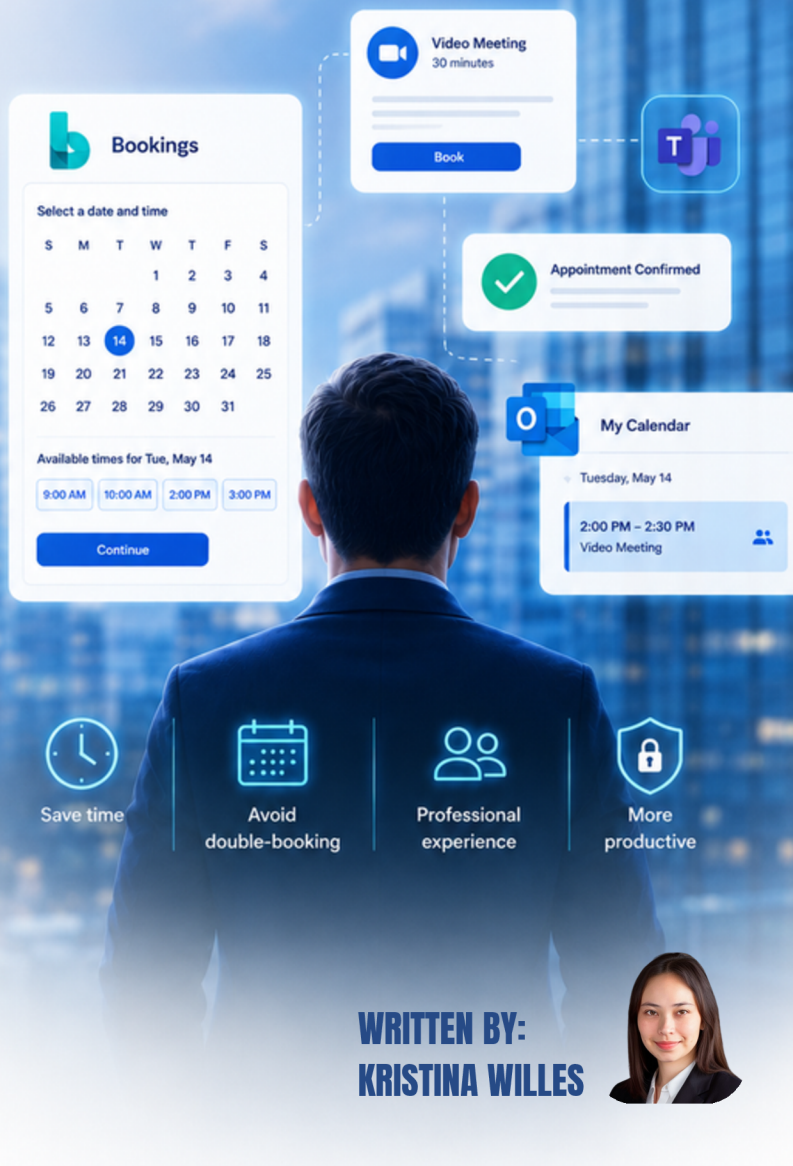
PANTHEON COMPUTERS

Microsoft tool or service	Business Basic Web & mobile apps with email	Apps for business Desktop apps only, no email	Business Standard Desktop apps with email	Business Premium Standard plus security & device management
IDENTITY & ACCESS MANAGEMENT				
Microsoft Entra ID Free — work accounts & basic directory	✓	—	✓	✓
Microsoft Entra ID P1 —self-service password reset, group-based licensing	—	—	—	✓
Multifactor authentication for work accounts	✓	—	✓	✓
Single sign-on for apps and services	✓	—	✓	✓
Conditional access policies	—	—	—	✓
Windows Hello for Business	—	—	—	✓
DEVICE & ENDPOINT MANAGEMENT				
Microsoft Intune Plan 1 —mobile device, laptop & PC management	—	—	—	✓
Windows 11 Pro upgrade rights	—	—	—	✓
THREAT PROTECTION				
Exchange Online Protection — spam & malware filtering	✓	—	✓	✓
Microsoft Defender for Office 365 Plan 1 — phishing & attachment defense	URL clicks only	—	URL clicks only	✓
Microsoft Defender for Business — endpoint EDR & ransomware	—	—	—	✓
DATA PROTECTION & COMPLIANCE				
Purview Information Protection Plan 1 — sensitivity labeling	—	—	—	✓
Purview Data Loss Prevention —email & files	—	—	—	✓
Purview Audit (Standard)	✓	—	✓	✓
Adoption Score & Secure Score	✓	—	✓	✓
PLAN LIMITS & SUPPORT				
Maximum users per tenant	300	300	300	300
24/7 phone and web support	✓	✓	✓	✓
Financially backed 99.9% uptime SLA	✓	✓	✓	✓

Not sure which license fits your team? Pantheon Computers will map your users to the right mix — licenses can be assigned tier by tier, role by role. Feature availability reflects Microsoft's published business plan lineup as of September 2026 and is subject to change.

Stop Playing Calendar Ping-Pong

How Microsoft Bookings Helps Create a More Efficient Modern Office



The modern office is no longer defined by a single physical location. Employees may be working from a company office, a home workspace, a customer location, or while traveling.

Yet many organizations still schedule appointments the same way they did years ago: through a long chain of emails.

- Are you available Tuesday?
- Tuesday doesn't work. How about Wednesday?
- I can do Wednesday at 2:00.
- That time was just taken. What about Thursday?

WRITTEN BY:
KRISTINA WILLES

This familiar process - sometimes called "calendar ping-pong" - may seem like a minor inconvenience, but those small interruptions can add up. Microsoft Bookings provides businesses with a simpler and more professional way to schedule appointments.

What is Microsoft Bookings?

Scheduling a 30-minute meeting should not require six emails.

Microsoft Bookings allows clients, vendors, prospects, or employees to choose an available appointment time through an online booking page. Because it connects with Microsoft 365 calendars, the times shown reflect the actual availability of the people involved. Appointments can then be added automatically to Outlook and include a Teams link when appropriate.

Businesses can use Bookings for consultations, interviews, support sessions, training, or internal meetings. The organization controls the appointment types, available hours, meeting lengths, and assigned employees.

The person scheduling can choose a convenient time—even outside normal business hours—without waiting for an email response. It is a simple way to eliminate calendar back-and-forth and make scheduling easier for everyone.

Create a Better First Impression

For many organizations, the scheduling process is one of the first interactions a prospective customer has with the business.

A simple online booking experience can make an organization appear more responsive, organized, and accessible. Prospective clients do not have to wait for someone to return an email before securing a meeting. They can review available times and choose an appointment when it is convenient for them.

Businesses still maintain control over the process. They can determine:

- Which services are available to book
- How long appointments should last
- Which employees can be scheduled
- How far in advance appointments can be made
- How much time is required between meetings
- Whether appointments are virtual or in person
- What information customers must provide when booking

The result is a scheduling experience that feels flexible for the customer without creating calendar chaos for the business.

A Natural Fit for Hybrid Work

Microsoft Bookings supports both in-person and virtual appointments. When an appointment is configured as an online meeting, Microsoft Teams information can be included automatically. The appointment appears on the appropriate calendars, and attendees receive the details they need to join.

This removes several manual steps from the process. Employees do not have to schedule the meeting, create a separate Teams link, copy the information into an email, and send instructions to each participant.

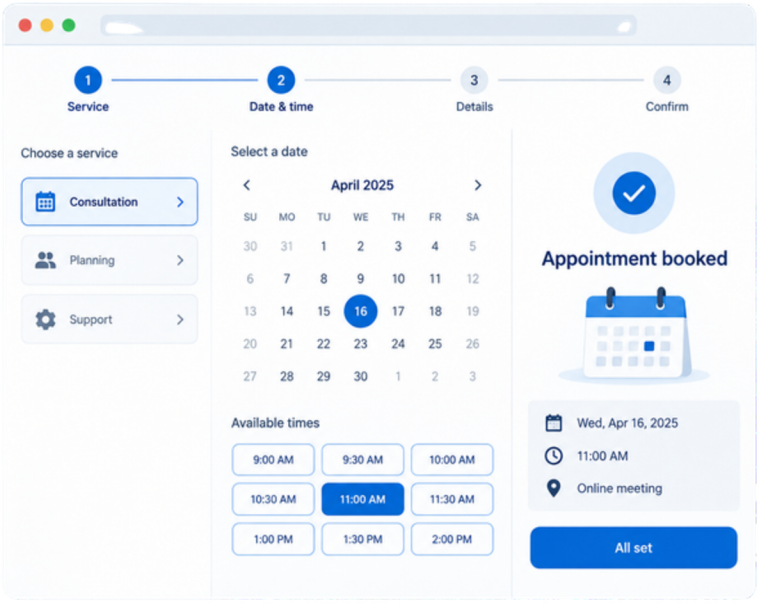
That automation helps create a smoother experience, particularly for businesses that regularly meet with remote customers, distributed teams, or clients in different locations.

Is Microsoft Bookings Right for Your Business?

Microsoft Bookings can be especially valuable for organizations that:

- Schedule frequent customer or prospect meetings
- Receive repeated requests for employee availability
- Support remote or hybrid employees
- Want to simplify appointment confirmations
- Need a consistent scheduling process across a team
- Frequently create Microsoft Teams meetings
- Want to improve the customer experience
- Already use Microsoft 365 and Outlook

The first step is to identify where scheduling friction currently exists.

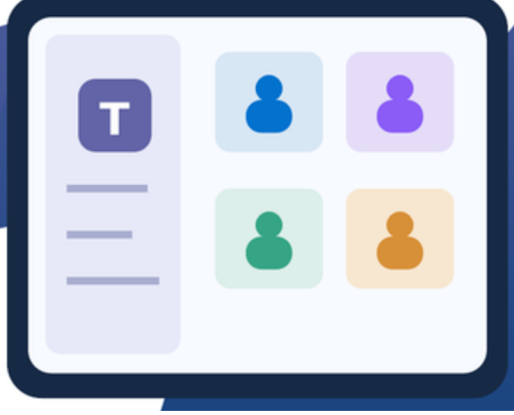


Employees can spend less time managing calendars and more time preeparing for the conversation, supporting the customer, or completing higher-value work.

MICROSOFT TEAMS: MORE THAN JUST MEETINGS

The tool many businesses already have may be capable of much more than they realize.

WRITTEN BY: CHRISTIAN STEWART



For a lot of organizations, Microsoft Teams became synonymous with video meetings. You click a link, turn on your camera, have a conversation, and move on with your day.

But Teams has grown into something much larger.

At its core, Microsoft Teams brings together communication, meetings, file sharing, applications, and collaboration into a common workspace. For businesses already using Microsoft 365, that creates an opportunity to consolidate how employees communicate and where they go to find information.

The real value of Teams is not necessarily any one feature. It is reducing the number of places employees have to look.

Think about the typical workday. A conversation starts in email. Someone sends a document. Another employee downloads it and saves a copy. A meeting gets scheduled to discuss it. Someone takes notes. A follow-up gets sent in another email.

Before long, information about one project is scattered across inboxes, file folders, notebooks, and conversations.

Teams can give that work a home.

Conversations Where the Work Happens

Instead of using email for every internal conversation, departments or project groups can use Teams and channels to keep conversations organized around a specific subject.

A sales team might have a channel for opportunities. An operations team might have one for scheduling. Leadership could have a private space for management conversations. A project team could keep discussions, meetings, files, and updates together.

The benefit is not simply fewer emails. It is context.

When a new employee joins a project, they do not necessarily need someone to forward six months of messages. They can look through the conversations and files associated with the team and get up to speed.

“The real value of Teams is reducing the number of places employees have to look.”

Meetings Are Still Important - They Are Just Part of the Picture

Teams remains a powerful meeting platform, with video meetings, screen sharing, collaborative features, and integration with other Microsoft 365 tools.

The difference is what happens before and after the meeting.

The invitation, conversation, shared documents, and follow-up can all remain connected to the same workspace. Instead of a meeting being an isolated event, it becomes part of an ongoing conversation. That can be especially helpful for organizations with employees working across multiple offices, from home, or in the field.

The Biggest Opportunity May Be Simplicity

Technology tends to accumulate.

A business might have one application for chat, another for video conferencing, another for files, another for phone calls, and email on top of everything else.

Every additional system means another application employees need to learn, another place to search for information, and potentially another platform the company needs to manage.

Teams will not replace every business application, nor should it. But organizations already invested in Microsoft 365 may be able to bring significantly more of their day-to-day collaboration into one place.

That does not happen automatically. Simply installing Teams does not create good collaboration. Businesses still need to decide how teams and channels should be organized, where documents belong, when employees should use Teams instead of email, and how information should be secured.

Those decisions are what turn Teams from another icon on the desktop into a useful business platform.

A Better Question to Ask

Instead of asking, “Do we use Microsoft Teams?” businesses may want to ask: “Are we using Teams well?”

If Teams is currently just the place your employees go when someone sends them a meeting invitation, there may be considerably more value sitting inside a tool you are already using.

“Microsoft Teams is most valuable when it becomes the place where conversations, files, meetings, and follow-up stay connected—giving employees fewer places to search and a clearer way to work together.”

What if your business phone was just part of Teams?

Cloud-based calling can bring an organization's phones, meetings, messaging and collaboration together.



WRITTEN BY:
JONATHAN YNCIERTO

It is Monday morning, and an employee is working from home when a customer calls the office. The call rings at their empty desk while they are already in Teams. By the time they notice the missed call, the customer has left a voicemail - or called someone else.

Business communication no longer happens at one desk. Teams Phone brings calling into the same workspace employees already use for meetings, messages and collaboration.

Teams Phone adds cloud-based telephone-system capabilities to Microsoft Teams, providing call-control functionality through Microsoft 365. With the right licensing, users can make and receive traditional calls through Teams.

Your number can follow you

A traditional office phone is tied to a desk. A Teams Phone user may answer business calls from a computer and headset, the Teams mobile app or compatible Teams-certified desk-phone hardware.

For employees moving between home, the office and customer locations, that flexibility can be valuable. Their business identity no longer has to depend on being next to one particular phone.

> **"The application employees already use for meetings can become their business phone, too."**

Familiar phone features remain

Moving calling into Teams does not mean giving up everyday business functionality. Common capabilities include call transfer, delegation, shared lines and group call pickup.

Organizations can also route calls around the way they actually operate - sending a main number to a receptionist, allowing a service team to answer one line, or applying different rules after hours.

One less communication silo.

The biggest advantage may not be the phone system itself. It is what happens when calling becomes part of the same environment employees already use for meetings and internal communication.

An employee can chat with a coworker, receive an outside business call, transfer it and return to work without jumping between several unrelated platforms. Teams Phone is not simply about replacing a telephone on a desk. It is an opportunity to reconsider how employees communicate.

Is it right for every business?

Not automatically. Faxing, paging, call centers, door systems, emergency calling, analog lines, elevators, credit-card terminals and other specialty applications must be considered. Network and internet reliability matter, too.

Start by asking: *How do we use phones today - and could Teams make that experience simple?*



Sharing Files Safely

Protecting your information beyond your organization.

Written By: Jeremy Tuttle

THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE

At 4:45 p.m., a manager emailed a budget workbook to a vendor for a one-hour review. Over the weekend, the attachment was forwarded to two teammates. By Monday, three copies existed - and none reflected the corrected pricing.

A link to the single SharePoint file would have kept one current version, granted view-only access, and allowed that access to expire after the review.

KNOW WHERE THE FILE LIVES

Keep the original file in the right place: OneDrive for individual work, or SharePoint and Teams for documents your team needs to manage together.

A shared link lets people work from that same trusted file instead of passing around email attachments.

ONE VERSION

Everyone works from the same, most up-to-date file.

CONTROL ACCESS

You decide who can access, what they can do, and for how long.

UPDATE ANYTIME

Changes are instant and visible to everyone with access.

SHARE WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Grant access only to those who need it.

SHARE WITH CONFIDENCE

Choose the lowest level of access that lets someone do their job.

1



VIEW ONLY

Recipients can view the file but cannot make changes.



2



COMMENT

Recipients can view the file and add comments.



3



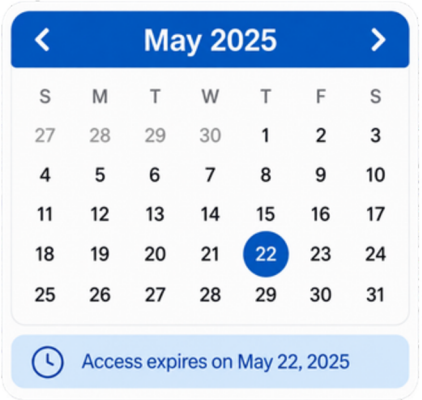
EDIT

Recipients can make changes to the file.



SET AN EXPIRATION DATE

Limit access by setting an expiration date for your secure link.



REVIEW WHAT YOU'RE SHARING

Before you send, take a moment to review.

- Do recipients really need this file?
- Have I removed sensitive or unnecessary information?
- Have I chosen the lowest access level needed?
- Have I set an expiration date if appropriate?
- Am I sharing with the right people?

Secure collaboration builds trust



Your Work. Anywhere.

Always Protected.

WRITTEN BY: MARICEL AUREA

> OneDrive separates your business data from your device - so your work is always with you.

We've seen it happen too often - someone's computer crashes and they loose all their files. The ones they keep on their desktop, documents, etc. OneDrive keeps those files safe for the user - in the cloud where they can access them from anywhere.

BUILT FOR THE WAY YOU WORK

KNOWN FOLDER MOVE

Back up your Desktop, Documents, and Pictures to the cloud. If a device fails, your files are safe and easy to recover.

FILES ON-DEMAND

See all your files without taking up valuable space. Keep what you need offline, stream the rest.

ACCESS ACROSS DEVICES

Your files follow you on any device - PC, Mac, tablet, or phone. Work how and where you want.

STORE FIRST DRAFTS

Keep the files you are still building separate and then move to Teams when they are ready.

RECOVER WITH CONFIDENCE

Version history and recycle bin make it easy to restore files after accidental deletions or unwanted changes.

SECURITY YOU CAN COUNT ON

SECURITY BUILT IN. BY DESIGN.



All OneDrive and Teams files are technically stored in SharePoint where security can be managed and enforced.

THE FILE SECURITY STACK

IDENTITY Microsoft Entra ID	Every access request is verified. Protect identities as agressively as endpoints.
AUTHENTICATION Multifactor Authentication (MFA)	MFA is the baseline defense against password compromise.
ACCESS Conditional Access	Control access based on device, location, risk, and more. Policies adapt to your needs.
DATA IN TRANSIT TLS Encryption	Data is protected in transit with industry-standard TLS encryption.
DATA AT REST AES-256 Encryption & Disk Encryption	Your files are encrypted at rest with multiple layers of storage protection.
RECOVERY Version History & Recycle Bin	Accidental changes or deletions? Easy recovery for common scenarios.
INFORMATION PROTECTION Microsoft Purview	Help prevent inappropriate sharing and protect sensitive information with the right policies.
ENDPOINT PROTECTION Microsoft Defender & Endpoint Management	Healthy, compliant devices reduce risk and keep your data secure.

SHARING MADE SAFE

- Control who can access and share your files.
- Use link settings that fit your policies.
- Monitor and audit activitiy.
- Stop oversharing before it becomes a problem.



WHERE DID THAT THING GO?

Was that a Teams message? Is that a document? Is that an email? Where is all that stuff?

WRITTEN BY:
KYLE SCHARFE

This is one of the daily frustrations of the modern office. We have more tools than ever for communicating, collaborating, and storing information. That is great - right up until you actually need to find something.

The the search begins.

Maybe it is in SharePoint. Maybe someone emailed it to me. Maybe it is buried in a Teams conversation from four months ago. Maybe Karen sent it with the subject line "FYI" - which really narrows things down.

ONE STARTING POINT

Teams SharePoint

Outlook Documents

Websites

↓

Microsoft Loop

This is why I like Microsoft Loop.

I can create a Loop page for one area of the business - sales, for example - and bring everything I need into that page. I can connect the spreadsheets stored in SharePoint, link important emails, include documents, add notes, and save links to useful websites.

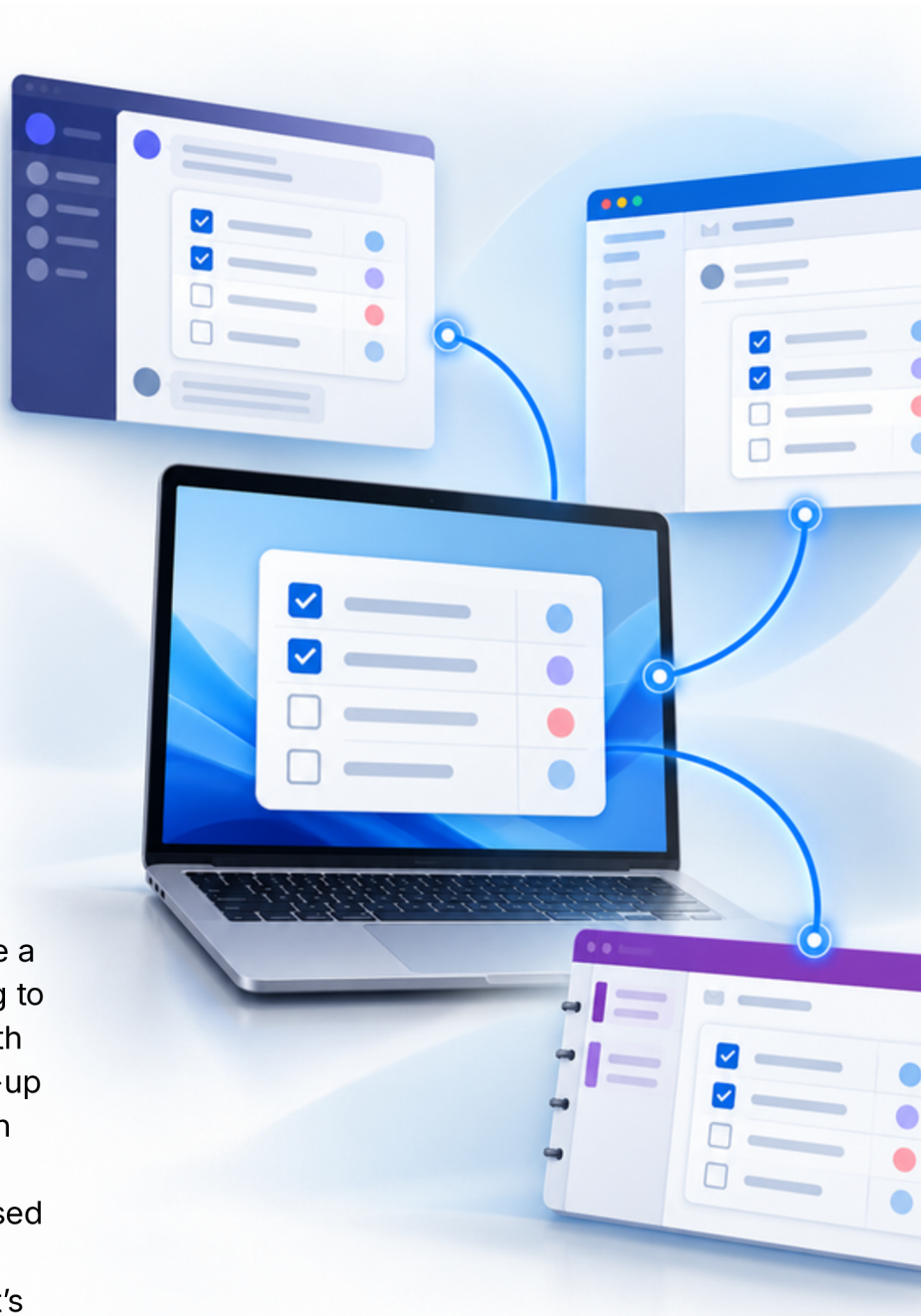
The information does not have to be moved out of the systems where it belongs. Loop simply gives me one place from which to find and work with it.

When I need something related to sales, I go to the sales page.

I do not have to remember whether the conversation happened in Teams, the spreadsheet lives in SharePoint, or the information was attached to an email.

I have one starting point instead of five possible hiding places.

LOOP COMPONENTS



Then there are Loop components – which might be the coolest part.

A Loop Component can be a table, checklist, task list, set of notes or another small piece of working information. Once you create it, you can then share it through supported Microsoft 365 applications such as Teams, Outlook or OneNote.

Whenever someone updates it ANYWHERE, it updates EVERYWHERE.

We don't all like to have things in the same place. And maybe by putting it in lots of places, you may actually get everyone to enter data.

For example, let's say you are going to have a potluck for lunch next Friday. You are trying to get people to sign up without ending up with 10 pans of brownies. If you create the sign-up list as a Loop Component, you can post it in multiple Teams channels, send it to some people in an email, post it in a frequently used OneNote, etc. Despite the fact that it is in multiple places, it is still ONE component. It's live everywhere.

Think about it. Everyone can find and update the sign up sheet in the place most convenient for them - and you don't have to make announcement after announcement or answer "where was it again?" twenty time.

Hello pasta salad and sloppy joes!

> **I do not need another place to put information. I need one place where I can find the information I already have.**
>
> **Loop gives me that.**

CLIPCHAMP:

Professional Video Editing Already Inside Your Office 365 Suite



CREATE. CONNECT. COMMUNICATE.

A new employee is starting Monday. The written instructions are several pages long, the screenshots are outdated, and no one has time for another meeting. Instead, the manager records a short sceen walkthrough and shares it. It is easier to follow, revisit, and update than another long email.

For Microsoft 365 users, Clipchamp is one video-editing option that may already be available within their existing tools.

WHAT IS CLIPCHAMP?

Clipchamp is Microsoft's easy-to-use video editor that combines professional-looking results with an interface that's approachable for virtually anyone.

Start with photos, video clips, screen recordings, or even a webcam recording. Then organize, enhance, and share your content. The result is a polished video - without the complexity of traditional editing software.

For organizations already invested in Microsoft 365, Clipchamp is another example of getting more value from the tools you may already own.

WHY VIDEO MATTERS

People consume more video today than ever before.

Businesses use video to educate customers, train employees, introduce products, and build stronger relationships. Internally, video can improve communication by allowing employees to share updates, explain processes, or provide demonstrations that are easier to understand than written instructions.

A short video can often communicate information more clearly - and add a personal touch.

EVERYDAY BUSINESS USES

Clipchamp is versatile enough for teams of any size.

Common workplace uses include:

- Employee onboarding and training videos
- Screen recordings for software tutorials
- Customer demonstrations and product walkthroughs
- Company announcements and leadership updates
- Social media content
- Event recaps and promotional videos
- Internal communications for remote or hybrid teams
- Presentation recordings for clients or employees

For organizations already invested in Microsoft 365, Clipchamp is another example of getting more value from the tools you may already own.

At home, video helps us preserve memories and celebrate life's important moments.

HELPFUL FEATURES THAT COULD SAVE TIME

Clipchamp includes tools that make video creation faster and easier, even if you've never edited a video before.

Depending on your Microsoft 365 plan and version, Clipchamp offers features such as:

TEMPLATES
Chose from professionally designed templates to get a head start.

SCREEN & WEBCAM RECORDING
Record your screen, webcam, or both - right inside Clipchamp.

AI - POWERED CAPTIONS
Automatically add captions to make your videos more accessible.

TEXT-TO-SPEECH
Turn text into natural-sounding voiceovers in just a few clicks.

STOCK MEDIA
Access royalty-free video, music, and graphics to enhance your story.

EASY EXPORT & SHARING
Export in high quality and share your video wherever you need it.

A SIMPLE WORKFLOW

1 RECORD
Capture video, your screen, or your ideas

2 EDIT
Trim, arrange, and add text, music, and more.

3 ENHANCE
Use tools and effects to make your video shine.

4 SHARE
Export and share anywhere.

WHEN A SHORT VIDEO CAN HELP

Clipchamp is not necessarily the answer for every video project. More complex productions may need specialized software, a professional videographer, or additional planning. but for a training walkthrough, short announcement, screen recording, or event recap, a simple tool can often be enough. The useful question is not "Should we make a video?" It is "Would video make this information easier to understand?"

WRITTEN BY:
KELSEY KAHNKE





BEYOND EMAIL AND SPREADSHEETS

WRITTEN BY:
JESSICA JONES

How Microsoft Forms, Planner, and Lists Help Build a More Modern Office

An employee emails a new equipment request. The message is forwarded to a manager for approval, copied into a spreadsheet for tracking, and eventually turned into a task for someone in IT. A week later, the employee asks for an update - and everyone has to retrace the email chain to figure out what happened.

It is a familiar situation in many workplaces. The problem is not necessarily a lack of effort or communication. More often, the process simply depends on too many disconnected messages, documents, and personal reminders.

The modern office needs a better way to collect information, assign responsibility, and track progress. Microsoft Forms, Planner, and Lists offer three practical tools for doing exactly that. Each serves a different purpose, but together they can turn an informal, email-driven process into something far more organized and visible.

Microsoft Forms

A better front door for collecting information.

Microsoft Planner

Turns requests into action and keeps work moving forward.

Microsoft Lists

Keeps important information organized over time.

Microsoft Forms
A BETTER FRONT DOOR

Many business processes begin with someone needing to provide information. It could be a client submitting feedback, an employee requesting new equipment, a manager preparing for a new hire, or a team registering for an event.

Microsoft Forms provides a simple, consistent place to begin.

Organizations can use Forms to create surveys, polls, questionnaires, registrations, and other structured requests. Responses can be reviewed as they arrive, analyzed using built-in reporting, or exported to Excel when additional analysis is needed. Forms can also include different question types, required fields, branching, and response settings.

> The real benefit is not the form itself. It is the quality of information the business receives.

Compare an email that says, “I need a new laptop,” with a form that asks for the employee’s name, department, current device, required applications, preferred completion date, manager approval, and business reason. The second option reduces back-and-forth communication and gives the person handling the request what they need from the beginning.

Forms can be useful for employee onboarding, purchase requests, customer satisfaction surveys, event registrations, training acknowledgments, internal nominations, and service intake. Instead of asking employees to remember what information to include, the form guides them through the process.

COMMON USES FOR FORMS

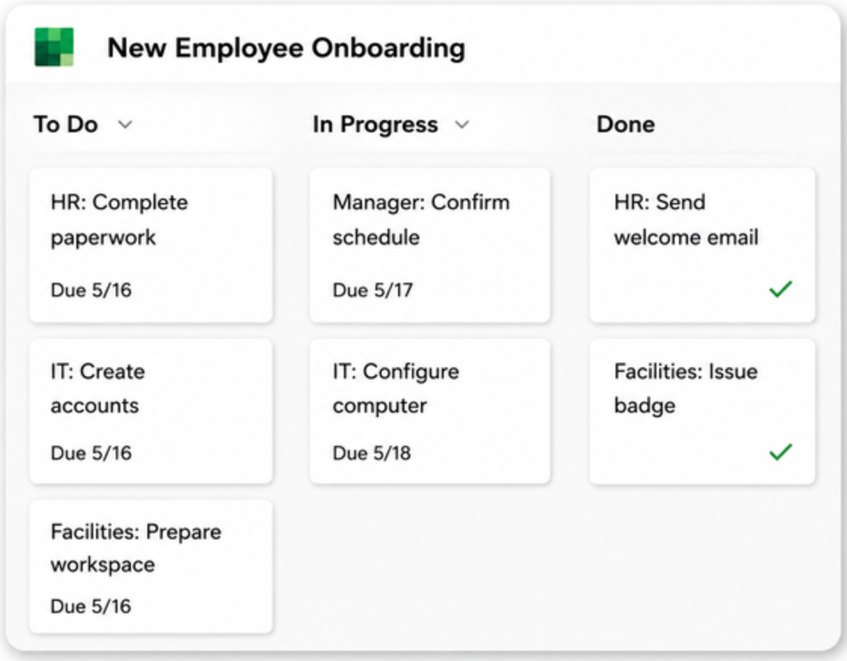
- Employee onboarding
- Purchase requests
- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Event registrations
- Training acknowledgements
- Internal nominations
- Service Intake

Microsoft Planner

TURNING REQUESTS INTO ACTION

Collecting information is only the beginning. Someone still needs to take responsibility for what happens next.

Microsoft Planner gives teams a visual way to organize tasks, assign ownership, establish due dates, and track progress. Plans can be divided into stages or categories, while individual tasks can include notes, checklists, attachments, priorities, and assigned team members. Planner also provides views that help teams understand what is coming due, what is in progress, and where work may be falling behind.



Consider onboarding a new employee. Human resources may need to complete paperwork. A manager must confirm the employee's schedule and responsibilities. IT may need to create accounts, configure a computer, assign software, and verify access. Facilities may need to prepare a workspace or badge. When those responsibilities live in separate inboxes, it is easy for one step to be overlooked. In Planner, each step can have an owner and deadline. Everyone involved can see the status of the overall process without scheduling another meeting or sending another "just checking in" email.

The Planner experience in Microsoft Teams can also bring individual and shared tasks into one location, helping employees see both their own priorities and the work they share with others.

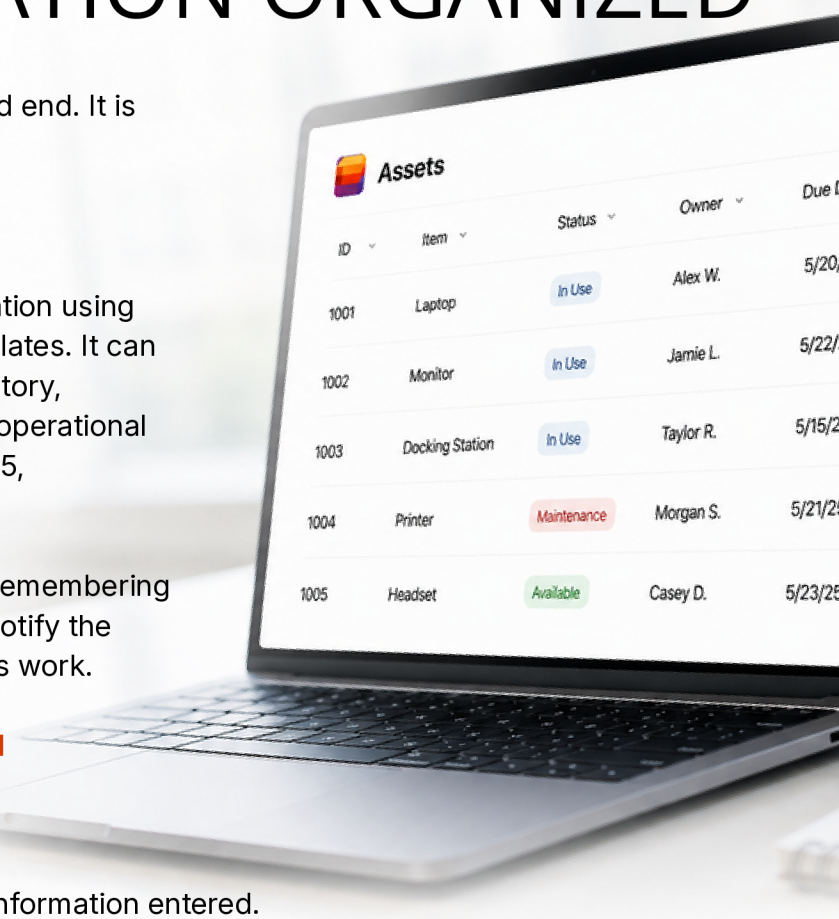
Planner is effective for any work that has more than one step, more than one owner or a change it will be forgotten. Examples could be marketing campaigns, office moves, quarterly priorities, recurring mainenance, policy updates, client implementations, and departmental improvement projects.

Microsoft Lists
KEEPING IMPORTANT INFORMATION ORGANIZED

Some work is not a project with a clear beginning and end. It is information that needs to be maintained over time.

That is where Microsoft Lists fits.

Lists allows organizations to track structured information using customizable columns, views, rules, alerts, and templates. It can be used for information such as assets, issues, inventory, contacts, routines, incidents, requests, and ongoing operational records. Lists can be accessed through Microsoft 365, SharePoint, and Microsoft Teams.



A traditional spreadsheet often relies on employees remembering to update the correct row, use the correct wording, notify the correct person, and avoid overwriting someone else's work.

Lists help reduce those risks through structure and automation.

- Columns can control the type of information entered.
- Rules can flag issues or highlight what needs attention.
- Alerts can notify the right people when something changes.
- Views can show the same information in different ways for different users.
- Templates can help teams get started quickly and stay consistant.

By keeping information accurate and up to date, Lists supports better decisions and faster action. It becomes a shared source of truth that grows more valuable over time.

Forms, Planner, and Lists together help your organization work smarter, stay organized, and focus on what matters most.

Making the Modern Office

More Human with Microsoft Viva



A practical look at how the tools already inside Microsoft 365 can help us connect, focus, learn, and grow.

BY EMORY MESA

Between emails, meetings, messages, and deadlines, it can sometimes feel like we spend more time managing our workday than doing our actual work. What if the Microsoft tools we already use could help us find information faster, protect our time, stay connected, and continue learning? That is the idea behind Microsoft Viva. Built into the Microsoft 365 and Teams experience, Viva brings workplace communication, learning, resources, and personal insights closer to the tools employees already use. Think of it as a set of helpful experiences within Microsoft that can make the workday feel a little more connected and intentional.

ONE NAME, MANY HELPFUL EXPERIENCES

Viva includes multiple apps, and each supports a different part of working life.

Viva Connections can serve as a digital front door to company news, policies, benefits, forms, and frequently used resources. Instead of searching through old emails or bookmarks, staff can begin from one familiar destination.

Viva Engage supports conversations and communities across the organization. It gives employees a place to share updates, ask questions, celebrate accomplishments, and connect with coworkers outside of their immediate team. For hybrid or growing workplaces, those small connections can help people feel informed and included.

Viva Insights focuses on work habits. Depending on your organization's setup, it can help you protect valuable time, make room to catch up on messages, or take breaks. These are simple actions, but they address a familiar office challenge: the calendar can fill itself before we make room for the work that matters most.

Viva Learning is useful because it brings professional development into the flow of work. Employees can discover learning content, save it for later, share it with coworkers and - when available - track assigned or completed training from one learning hub.

WAYS VIVA HAS IMPACTED MY WORK

I have found Viva Learning helpful as I continue building my knowledge in the IT world. Microsoft is one of the biggest tools in our workplace, so it is important to understand not only the software we use, but also how its different pieces work together. Viva Learning gives me endless options to explore-whether I want to stregthen a skill I use now or learn about a part of Microsoft that is new to me. It has led to my professional impact being organized, more productive, and easily streamlined.

That same approach can work in any role. An accountant might sharpen an Excel skill. A manager might explore better meeting habits. A customer-facing employee might take a course on communication, while someone beginning a new responsibility can search for a quick introduction before they get started.

> **The value is not in completing everything. It is in finding the right piece of knowledge at the right time.**

WAYS TO TRY VIVA THIS WEEK

Protect one focus block.

Open Viva Insights and reserve time for work that needs your full attention.

Learn for 15 minutes

Search Viva Learning for a skill connected to a current task or professional goal.

Recognize someone

Use Viva Engage post to thank a coworker for a specific contribution.

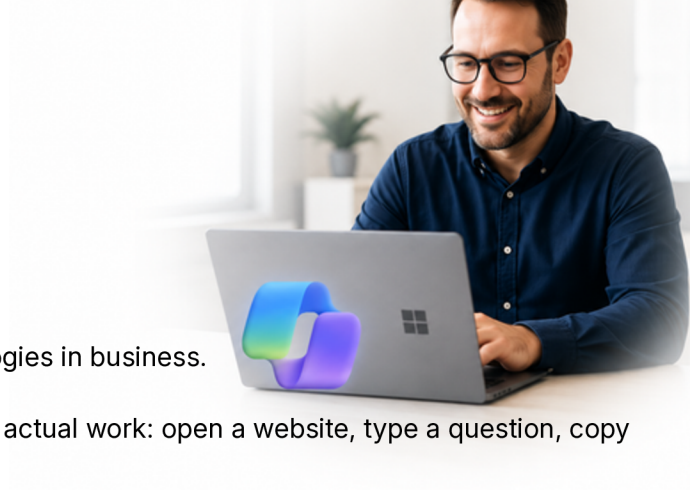


The phrase "modern office" often brings new devices, artificial intelligence, or flexible workspaces to mind. Those things matter, but a truly modern workplace also helps people find information, protect their attention, stay connected, and keep learning.

Microsoft Viva can support each of those goals without pulling employees far from the Microsoft tools they already know. Start small: pin a Viva app in Teams, explore one resource, schedule a focus block, or complete one short lesson.

A few intentional minutes can make technology feel less like another demand and more like what it should be - a tool that helps people do their best work.

Microsoft 365 Copilot: Bringing AI Into the Workday



Artificial intelligence becomes much more interesting when it understands the work you are already doing.

Artificial intelligence has become one of the most talked-about technologies in business.

But for many employees, AI still feels like something separate from their actual work: open a website, type a question, copy the answer somewhere else, and continue working.

Microsoft 365 Copilot takes a different approach.

Microsoft describes Microsoft 365 Copilot as an AI-powered productivity tool that combines large language models with Microsoft 365 applications and, where appropriately licensed and configured, organizational information available through Microsoft Graph.

That means AI can increasingly show up inside the applications people are already using.

And that is where things get interesting.

Start With the Blank Page

Think about how much of the average workday begins with a blank screen.

Write an email. Create an agenda. Summarize a document. Prepare talking points. Turn meeting notes into something presentable. Create the first draft of a proposal.

None of these tasks necessarily require hours, but collectively they consume a tremendous amount of time.

Copilot can help employees get from nothing to a first draft much faster.

The key word is first.

AI is not a replacement for judgment, expertise, or accountability. A proposal still needs to be reviewed. Numbers need to be verified. An important customer email deserves a human read before someone clicks Send.

Copilot can turn your notes, prompts, and existing content into a workable first draft in minutes, giving you a strong starting point to refine instead of starting from a blank page.

Finding the Important Part

Sometimes the problem is not creating information. It is finding it.

We have all opened an email thread with 30 replies and thought, “What did we actually decide?” Or returned from vacation to a long list of messages and meetings. Or opened a lengthy document when all we really needed was the answer to one question.

Copilot can assist with summarization, drafting, analysis, and working with content throughout supported Microsoft 365 experiences. Depending on licensing and functionality, that can include Teams, Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and the Microsoft 365 Copilot app.

That is where AI has the potential to become less of a novelty and more of an everyday assistant.

Your Data Matters

There is an important conversation businesses should have before broadly adopting tools like Copilot: What information can our employees already access?

AI can make information easier to find, but that makes existing data-management and permission decisions more important - not less.

If an employee has inappropriate access to a folder today, AI does not create that permission problem. But technology that makes searching and summarizing information easier can make poorly managed permissions more noticeable.

That means Copilot readiness is not only an AI conversation.



It is also a conversation about

- Microsoft 365 permissions
- SharePoint and Teams organization
- Data governance
- Security
- Employee training
- Acceptable AI use
- What information should and should not be shared with AI tools

Organizations that address those fundamentals are in a much better position to get meaningful value from AI.

The Best Use Cases Usually Are Not Flashy

The most valuable Copilot use case is your organization may not be creating an increadible presentation in 30 seconds.

It could be much simpler.

- An employee saves 15 minutes preparing for a meeting.
- A manager gets through a lengthy document faster.
- Someone improves the wording of an important email.
- A salesperson summarizes the history of an opportunity.
- An employee turns rough notes into a professional first draft.

Multiply those small improvements across dozens of employees and hundreds of workdays, and the opportunity becomes much easier to understand.

Start With a Problem, Not AI

One of the easiest mistakes organizations can make is deciding they need AI simply because everyone is talking about AI.

A better approach is to ask:
Where does our team lose time today?

Look for employees who repeatedly summarize information, search through documents, create similar content, prepare for meetings, or turn one form of information into another. Then determine whether Copilot can help.

The organizations that benefit most will not necessarily be the ones that adopt AI first. They will be the ones that figure out where AI actually makes work better.



Putting Repetitive Work on Autopilot

An Introduction to Power Automate

WRITTEN BY: JAY HOLMES

15 MINUTES

× 52 WEEKS

= 13 HOURS A YEAR

WHAT IS POWER AUTOMATE?

Power Automate helps you build workflows that handle repetitive tasks for you - so you can focus on work that matters.

It connects the apps you already use and automates the steps you do over and over again.

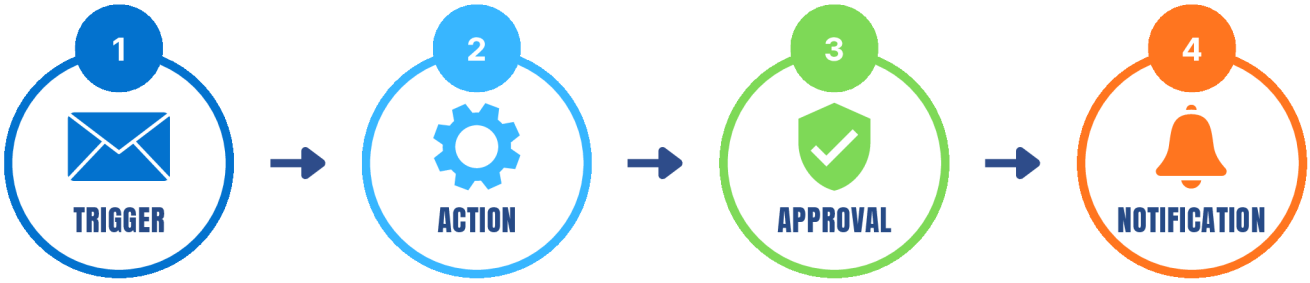
AUTOMATION IS ALREADY ALL AROUND YOU.

From saving email attachments to sending reminders, automation keeps things moving in the background - accurately and on time.

You don't need to be a developer to start. You just need a process worth improving.

> ***Something happens. Power Automate notices. Something else happens automatically.***

SPOT IT. AUTOMATE IT.



LOOK FOR "EVERY TIME"

- Every Friday...
- When this form is completed...
- At the end of every month...

SMALL AUTOMATIONS. BIG IMPACT.



AUTOMATION SHOULD SUPPORT YOUR TEAM



ACCOUNTING

Automate report collection and reconciliation.



SALES

Capture leads, update CRM, and follow-up - automatically.



MANAGERS

Get updates, approvals, and insights without the chase.

AUTOMATE THE PROCESS - NOT THE PROBLEM

Fix the process first. Then automate it.

YOUR PASSWORD ISN'T ENOUGH

The simple app that can stop a stolen password from becoming a stolen account.

WRITTEN BY: DILLON IVERSON



We use passwords for almost everything: email, Microsoft 365, banking, business applications, cloud storage and more.

But there's one problem.

Passwords can be stolen.

A convincing phishing email, a compromised website or a data breach can expose even a strong password. That's why more organizations are adding another checkpoint before letting someone into an account.

That checkpoint is an authenticator app.

THINK OF IT LIKE A SECOND LOCK.

A password is the first lock on the door. Your authenticator app is the second.

ONE TAP. A LOT MORE PROTECTION.

An authenticator app is an application on your smartphone or tablet that helps confirm that the person signing in is really you.

When you log in to a protected account, the app may:

SEND AN APPROVAL NOTIFICATION
Tap to confirm the sign-in.

GENERATE A ONE-TIME CODE
Enter a temporary code that typically changes every 30 seconds.

WHY AUTHENTICATOR APPS ARE WORTH IT

BETTER PROTECTION

A stolen password alone may no longer be enough to access your account.

MORE THAN A TEXT CODE

Authenticator apps give you a dedicated way to verify a sign-in instead of relying on a password or text message alone.

FAST APPROVALS

A sign-in notification can often be approved in just a few seconds.

WORKS WITHOUT CELL SERVICE

Many authenticator apps can generate verification codes even when cellular service isn't available.

MEET THE APPS PROTECTING YOUR SIGN-INS

Authenticator apps have become a familiar security tool for organizations around the world, from businesses and healthcare providers to financial institutions and government agencies.

Some of the most common options include:

- Microsoft Authenticator
- Google Authenticator
- Cisco Duo Mobile
- Okta Verify

THE SIGN-IN REQUEST YOU SHOULD NEVER APPROVE

You phone buzzes.
Microsoft Authenticator is asking you to approve a login.

There's just one problem:

YOU AREN'T TRYING TO LOG IN.

Don't approve it.
An unexpected authentication request could mean someone else is trying to access your account.

DENY THE REQUEST.

Then contact your IT department.

That tiny decision can make a very big difference.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Cybersecurity doesn't always require a complicated new tool.

Sometimes it's one small extra step.

A few seconds spent verifying a sign-in can help prevent hours - or days - of dealing with a compromised account.





DEFENDER VS TRUE EDR

WRITTEN BY:
ANGEL ANDERSON



Antivirus isn't what it used to be - and that's a good thing. Modern endpoint protection has evolved beyond simply looking for known viruses.

WHY MICROSOFT DEFENDER IS NOT ENOUGH

Microsoft Defender provides a useful basic layer of protection, but not every version offers the same capabilities. Defender for Business, included with Microsoft 365 Business Premium, has antivirus and some Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) features. However, it does not include the full threat-hunting, investigation, automation, and Extended Detection and Response (XDR) capabilities available in Microsoft's higher-level security plans.

Endpoint protection also requires more than detecting a suspicious file. Security tools must recognize unusual behavior, investigate activity across devices, isolate infected computers, and stop an attack before it spreads. Alerts must also be monitored and acted upon quickly. Microsoft Defender alone does not provide that complete managed response.

A stronger next-generation antivirus and EDR solution provides better visibility, behavioral detection, automated containment, and centralized monitoring. Microsoft Defender remains a helpful security layer, but it should not be relied upon as the organization's complete endpoint security solution.

WHAT IS NEXT-GENERATION ANTIVIRUS?

Next-generation antivirus (NGAV) goes far beyond traditional signature-based protection. It combines advanced threat prevention techniques - like behavior analysis, machine learning, exploit prevention, and cloud intelligence - to stop attacks before they can excute.

Instead of only looking for known threats, NGAV focuses on identifying suspicious behavior and blocking malicious activity in real time - across files, applications, scripts, and the web.

WHY EDR MATTERS

Even with strong prevention, some threats can slip through. That's where Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) comes in.

EDR continuously monitors endpoint activity to detect suspicious behavior, investigate incidents, and respond quickly to contain and eliminate threats - before they can spread.

It provides the visibility and contect security teams need to hunt threats, stop attacks, and strengthen defenses over time.

Universal Print



WRITTEN BY: DALE LOWE

THE PRINT SERVER YOU CAN FINALLY RETIRE

Somewhere in almost every office is a print server nobody wants to touch - rebooted more times than anyone can count, set up by someone who left years ago, half its queues pointed at printers that were replaced two moves back. Universal Print is Microsoft's answer to that server: cloud-based print management, built into Microsoft 365, that lets you retire the on-premise print infrastructure entirely.

HOW IT WORKS

Universal Print moves print queue management into the cloud alongside the rest of Microsoft 365. Printers are registered once, then managed and shared through the same admin center and Azure AD identity you already use for everything else — no local print server, no per-machine driver installs, no on-site box quietly aging in a closet.

PRINTING ACROSS LOCATIONS

This is the scenario that sells most people on Universal Print the moment they see it: an employee working from home sends a document to the office printer, and it's waiting when they walk in that afternoon. Or someone at the main office sends a job to a satellite location three towns over, so it's printed and ready before they arrive for a meeting. Because printers are registered in the cloud rather than tied to a local server, a user can see and print to any printer they have permission for — across floors, buildings, or cities — the same way they'd pick a printer on their home network. For organizations with multiple offices or a hybrid workforce, that alone tends to justify the switch.

WHY IT'S WORTH TURNING ON

- No print server to patch, maintain, or eventually replace — one less on-premise box to worry about.
- Access is managed through Azure AD, so print permissions follow the same identity and security policies as everything else — including automatic removal when an employee's account is disabled.
- Print activity is logged and auditable, which matters for HIPAA, CJIS, and other compliance-driven environments where "who printed what, and when" needs a real answer.
- It's already included in most Microsoft 365 Business Premium and E3/E5 licenses

WHAT TO CHECK FIRST

Universal Print works best with printers that support the connector natively; older printers can still participate through a lightweight connector on a Windows device. Licensing includes a set number of print jobs per user per month, so high-volume environments should size that out first. Beyond that, it's a straightforward move—and for most small and mid-sized offices, one of the simplest ways to reduce the equipment they need to keep on-site.

STOP LETTING IT RUN YOUR BUSINESS.
START MAKING IT DRIVE IT.
VIRTUAL CIO (VCIO) PROGRAM



PANTHEON COMPUTERS

If your technology feels reactive, unpredictable, or more expensive than it should be — you don't need more tools. You need leadership.

Our Virtual CIO (vCIO) program delivers executive-level technology strategy, financial control, and risk oversight — without the cost of a full-time CIO.

What Changes When You Have a vCIO?

Clarity
A 3-year technology vision and a practical 9–12 month execution plan aligned to your business goals.

Control
Vendor accountability, renewal oversight, and cost optimization recommendations.

Reduced Risk
A ranked Top-10 Risk Register, security governance, and compliance readiness.

Accountability
Monthly Executive Scorecards with measurable results — not vague IT updates.

Momentum
An automation and AI roadmap focused on ROI, not chaos.

In Just 90 Days, You'll Have:

- Clear governance and defined ownership (no more confusion)
- Executive visibility into risks, spend, and priorities
- A documented security baseline
- Vendor and software transparency
- A predictable cadence of progress

Built For Growing Organizations

That need CIO-level leadership — but aren't ready to hire one full-time.

Technology should increase profitability — not create uncertainty.

Schedule a strategy conversation and see what a vCIO could unlock for your organization.

507-718-4288 | contact@pantheoncomputers.com

TECH TIME-OUT

Modern Office Word Search

Find the tools and habits that help the modern office work.

Words may appear forward, backward, up, down, or diagonally.

S	L	J	W	C	M	S	G	A	R	T	E	A	M	S
G	U	Q	G	C	O	L	L	A	B	O	R	A	T	E
N	U	Y	N	W	O	R	K	S	P	A	C	E	J	O
I	R	W	S	Q	C	L	I	P	C	H	A	M	P	U
K	E	B	T	N	B	I	G	S	N	X	R	S	S	W
O	R	O	T	A	C	I	T	N	E	H	T	U	A	O
O	P	G	F	T	X	F	W	B	V	E	Q	K	M	R
B	W	M	S	E	C	U	R	I	T	Y	B	G	G	K
W	R	E	D	N	E	F	E	D	B	O	X	D	Z	F
P	U	B	T	C	A	L	E	N	D	A	R	P	J	L
E	V	I	R	D	E	N	O	V	G	N	E	B	F	O
K	M	A	F	L	E	X	I	B	I	L	I	T	Y	W
A	E	O	Y	Z	R	H	F	M	E	F	D	L	F	Q
M	S	I	M	I	R	E	M	O	T	E	E	A	Y	F
H	P	L	A	N	N	E	R	A	Z	X	Z	V	S	U

WORD BANK

AUTHENTICATOR
BOOKINGS
CALENDAR
CLIPCHAMP
COLLABORATE
DEFENDER
FLEXIBILITY
ONEDRIVE
PLANNER
REMOTE
SECURITY
TEAMS
WORKFLOW
WORKSPACE

BONUS: Circle the first tool you want to use more often this year.

Our Core Values

Pantheon Computers believes that everything we do is rooted in relationships. It is the nature and character of that relationship that forms our core values. In our relationships with each other and our clients we are committed to:

1. Being an Invested Partner
2. Doing the Right Thing
3. Being Accountable
4. Striving for Transformative Growth

Invested Partner

Pantheon takes the time to learn about your business and what success means to you. We want to understand your goals and concerns so that we can provide you with the information and support you need to make decisions that move your business forward. Every person at every level of Pantheon is involved so we can provide multi-dimensional support. We have your best interests in mind, because we believe that your success is our success. We strive to function as an integral part of your team.

Do the Right Thing

We aim to provide excellent value for your dollar. The IT line item in your budget is significant and it is vital for that money to be an investment in your success and not just an expense. We commit to not over-selling or under-solving your problems. We take pride in knowing that we are fair and honest in our recommendations for your business and earn the trust of our clients. We genuinely care about client satisfaction. Your concerns, needs and worries are a priority for us, and we diligently seek ways to assist in addressing and alleviating those things for you. We also understand that you do not necessarily have the tools or knowledge available to make sure we are doing our jobs properly. So, we commit to doing the right thing for your business – even if that results in a loss for us.

Accountable

The truth is a lot of clients don't really understand a lot of what we do. Holding your MSP accountable can be hard. We make it easier with reporting, having frank conversations on visible accountability, and regular check-ins with your advisor to track the progress on your goals. When we make mistakes, we will own them. This is important because once we are all comfortable with accountability on the day-to-day stuff, we can move on to the fun stuff like innovation, automation and AI.

Transformative Growth

We want to help you dream and then help you get to your dream. Our senior advisors run our business, so they understand the struggles and the joys of it. They also want to talk about your strategic goals, budgeting, forecasting/road mapping, risk management, compliance, cyber security insurance plans, and new technologies. We are always looking to learn more; and then work on thinking critically and creatively on ways new technologies can benefit you.

www.pantheoncomputers.com

507-718-4288

contact@pantheoncomputers.com

★★★★★

Joanne Education

Reliable, Responsive, and Personable IT Support with Pantheon

One of the greatest benefits of working with Pantheon is the confidence of knowing we don't have to solve all our technology issues ourselves. With technology constantly changing, it's wonderful to have a trusted partner we can rely on for help and direction.

Pantheon is equipped to handle the size and complexity of our organization's needs. Before Pantheon, our previous provider struggled to keep up, which frustrated both parish and school staff and hindered our productivity. Now, we are more confident with the necessary support we need regarding IT issues.

Customer service is where Pantheon truly stands out. In a world dominated by automated systems and long hold times, it's refreshing to work with a company where you know the people you're calling. Even when we submit a ticket or email, Pantheon usually responds right away. When I'm able to speak with a real person, I'm confident my issue will be resolved quickly and efficiently.

Pantheon delivers IT support with a personal touch, and we are very happy with their service.

★★★★★

Katie Services

Pantheon: IT Peace of Mind for Small Businesses

We don't have to think about anything IT-related. Pantheon provides the services, goods, and support we need for any IT issue that comes our way. What we have with Pantheon is peace of mind.

I'm especially impressed with their annual recommendations. There's no nickel-and-diming—they provide the support we need, when and how we need it, without a huge bill afterward. We're always prioritized when we have urgent issues, and their customer service is excellent.

Pantheon consistently recommends products that are necessary, not just to make money off us. They understand that we're a small business trying to grow, and every penny matters. Security is a priority, and they ensure we get what's essential while offering additional suggestions if we want more.Honestly, I think Pantheon is great. If you're looking for reliable IT support with a personal touch, they're the team to call.

If you're looking for a partner, Pantheon is it. It's like having an IT firm right in your building, without needing to hire or train anyone. You know you're getting top-of-the-line service at a reasonable price, and their excellent customer service is always there when you need them

PANTHEON COMPUTERS

About Us

Pantheon is proudly owned and operated by Jill Stagman and Reyna Monson. As a locally and woman-owned business, we are deeply committed to the communities we serve. Our leadership reflects our belief in building strong, inclusive organizations that prioritize relationships, integrity, and long-term impact.

At Pantheon, our goal is to make a meaningful difference. We do this by supporting and securing businesses throughout the region, helping them operate confidently in an increasingly complex technological landscape. By providing reliable solutions, trusted guidance, and responsive service, we empower organizations to focus on what they do best — growing their businesses and serving their customers.

We believe that when local businesses are strong and secure, communities thrive. By protecting critical operations, safeguarding data, and strengthening IT infrastructure, we contribute to economic stability and opportunity across the region. Our work goes beyond technology; it is about enabling people, supporting livelihoods, and fostering environments where individuals, families, and organizations can live, work, and succeed.

PANTHEON COMPUTERS

507 - 718 - 4288

contact@pantheoncomputers.com

www.pantheoncomputers.com

400 15th Ave SE, Waseca, MN 56093

At Pantheon, we are not just a service provider — we are a partner invested in the long-term success of our clients and the vitality of our communities.

WOMEN OWNED
CERTIFIED BY | WOMEN'S BUSINESS ENTERPRISE NATIONAL COUNCIL

YOUR GO TO MICROSOFT 365

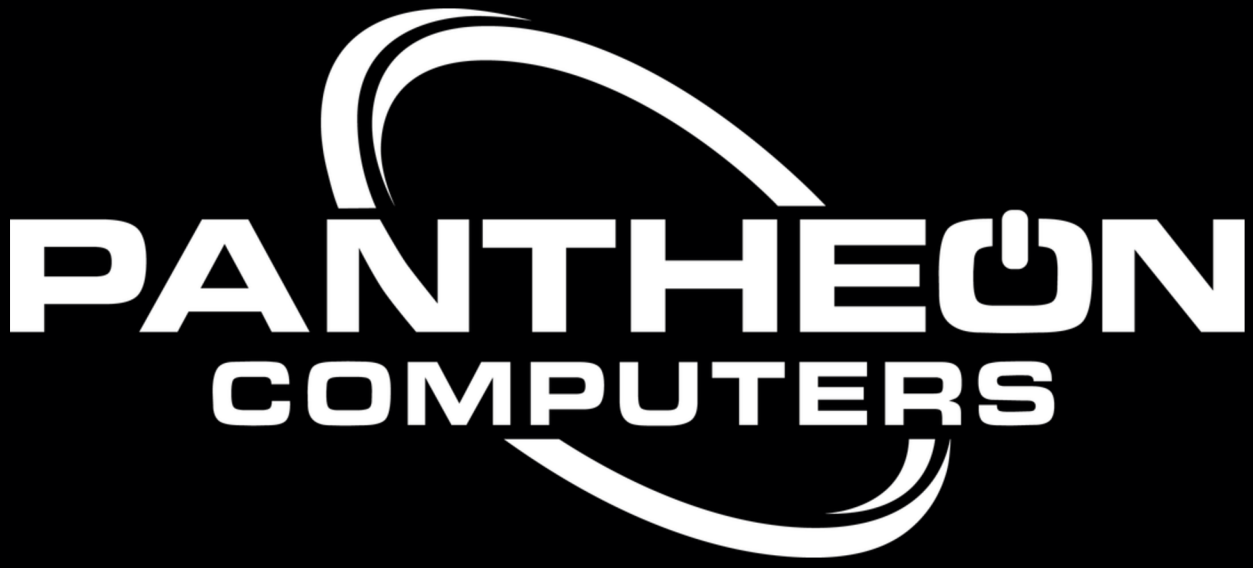
RESOURCE LIST

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