Microsoft Office 2013 preview

WE EXPLORE THE FEATURES AND FUNCTIONALITY OF THE SOFTWARE GIANT’S LATEST OFFICE APPLICATIONS PAGE 18

Virtual testing
WE LOOK AT HOW NATIONWIDE HAS REDUCED DEVELOPMENT TIME AND CUT COSTS WITH VIRTUAL TESTING PAGE 4

World trading
LONDON STOCK EXCHANGE CIO ANTOINE SHAGOURY ON DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY SERVICES WORLDWIDE PAGE 8
Relationship management? that is the question many different parts of any business.

Over the course of the past year there have been seismic upheavals in their industry. In a shift from competition to a fight for survival, swathes of companies face seismic upheavals in their industry.

Are you up to speed with business relationship management?
Over the course of the past year there has been an increased discussion around business relationship management. While this was a “new” process in last year’s ITIL 2011 edition, it is certainly not new to many others. In fact, as a concept at the very least, it’s been about for a long time across many different parts of any business.
OUTSOURCING
Customers urged to boycott CSC over CIA ‘torture flights’
CSC customers are being urged to boycott the supplier over allegations that it took part in illegal CIA rendition flights in the US “war on terror”. CSC has been linked in court documents to the rendition of German citizen Khaled El-Masri, whose case against alleged CIA collaborators in the Macedonian intelligence services is pending at the European Court of Human Rights.

FINANCIAL SERVICES
NatWest customers hit by further online banking issues
NatWest suffered a significant outage, leaving customers unable to access their online banking or use their debit cards. Customers have been complaining about the problems at NatWest, with a number of readers contacting Computer Weekly to highlight the issue.

CLOUD COMPUTING
Windows Azure ‘availability issues’ hit users in Europe
Users of Microsoft’s cloud-based Azure computing platform have been affected by an availability issue. The service was down for 2.5 hours. Microsoft said the service interruption in western Europe has been resolved. “Customers who have questions regarding this incident are encouraged to contact Customer Service and Support,” said a Microsoft spokesman.

NETWORK HARDWARE
Alcatel-Lucent slashes 5,000 jobs following substantial loss
Telecoms kit maker Alcatel-Lucent is to cut 5,000 jobs as part of a move to save €750m (£588m) amid results which saw the company haemorrhaging profits for the second quarter. For the three months to June, the company lost €234m, compared with profit gains of €43m in the same period last year. The Paris-based company saw sales fall by 7.1% to €3.5bn, compared with the same period last year.

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS
Cisco loses 1,300 jobs in another round of cost-cutting
Cisco Systems is to cut around 1,300 jobs – 2% of its workforce – in continued efforts to cut costs and streamline decision making. The company said in a statement: “We routinely review our business to determine where we need to align investment based on growth opportunities. We continue to evaluate our organisational structure as part of our plan to drive simplicity, speed of decisions and agility across Cisco.”

Akamai on its marks to stream Olympics coverage across Europe
Akamai has signed deals with 15 European broadcasters to stream live footage of the London 2012 Olympic Games across its network. The company will use its existing content delivery cloud platform to provide both live and on-demand videos for viewers who, in addition to TV coverage of the Olympics, are expected to seek content via their mobiles, tablets, laptops and PCs.

The growing adoption rates of mobile devices mean these Olympic Games could be the most viewed in history, due to the ability to watch them wherever the viewer may be. This puts extra pressure on Akamai, which has to provide the best experience for the broadcasters’ users. Consumers are much more discerning now, and expect an experience online that matches that of traditional TV,” said a company spokeswoman.

Income from IT management consulting 2011 (by sector)

Hackers & Cyber Crime Prevention
Government invites universities to train cyber spooks
The government is hoping to shore up its defences against cyber crime through post-graduate training, and has asked universities to apply for funding to run training courses for post-graduates. Through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), universities have been invited to apply for grants.

Mobile Networks
Orange offers connectivity under the English Channel
Orange has announced it will provide 2G and 3G services in the Channel Tunnel, for Eurostar foot passengers and Eurotunnel drivers to use mobile phones. The 53km stretch of rail between Calais and Folkestone in the south tunnel runs 100m below the surface of the English Channel and takes about 30 minutes to travel. Now, passengers will be able to make phone calls or surf the internet.

Risk Management
BlackHat 2012: UK firm reveals chip and PIN vulnerability
Retail chip and PIN devices can be attacked easily, exposing banks, retailers and customers to fraud. Researchers from Basingstoke-based MWR InfoSecurity demonstrated at the 2012 Black Hat conference in Las Vegas that it is possible to attack chip and PIN devices using a specially prepared chip-based credit card.

Social Media Technology
Facebook on the hunt for London-based engineering team
Facebook is on the hunt for 22 new recruits to make up its new London-based engineering team. The team will be led by software engineer Philip Su and has so far advertised for 22 jobs including positions in sales, monetisation, developer relations, software engineering, datacentre design and operations, platform product marketing, recruitment and growth, engagement and mobile.

Black Hat Conference
“The lack of chip and PIN security is putting millions of businesses around the globe at risk”
Ian Shaw, managing director, MWR InfoSecurity

Black Hat Conference
“The lack of chip and PIN security is putting millions of businesses around the globe at risk”
Ian Shaw, managing director, MWR InfoSecurity

The lack of chip and PIN security is putting millions of businesses around the globe at risk”
Ian Shaw, managing director, MWR InfoSecurity

Social Media Technology
Facebook on the hunt for London-based engineering team
Facebook is on the hunt for 22 new recruits to make up its new London-based engineering team. The team will be led by software engineer Philip Su and has so far advertised for 22 jobs including positions in sales, monetisation, developer relations, software engineering, datacentre design and operations, platform product marketing, recruitment and growth, engagement and mobile.

Social Media Technology
Facebook on the hunt for London-based engineering team
Facebook is on the hunt for 22 new recruits to make up its new London-based engineering team. The team will be led by software engineer Philip Su and has so far advertised for 22 jobs including positions in sales, monetisation, developer relations, software engineering, datacentre design and operations, platform product marketing, recruitment and growth, engagement and mobile.
Nationwide uses a virtualised environment to test its internet banking system to cut costs and development time for new online services.

The building society is using CA's Lisa Virtualise software to create copies of its 36 back-end systems to enable testers to try out software in a virtual live environment.

It is working towards becoming a full service bank and is currently undergoing a £1bn IT transformation project. The virtualisation of testing is part of that project, according to the firm's testing best practice manager, Andy Armstrong.

Nationwide, which launched the first online bank 12 years ago, had added functionality over the years. “About two years ago, we realised we needed to do something because it had become clunky,” said Armstrong.

Virtual performance testing

The bank hired a third party to create and test the system. When it came to performance testing, it sought a quicker and less costly method than building a copy of the live environment.

Nationwide’s internet banking platform links to 36 systems, including its Unisys mainframe-based customer database, which holds 16 million records. All these systems link to the internet bank, so each of them has to be recreated to enable testing.

Armstrong said to create a live version of the database would require specialist skills, making it expensive and time consuming. “To roll out a copy of the customer database would cost a seven-figure sum. Although the database is an extreme case, there are 35 other systems that have to be recreated for a live test,” he said.

Using CA’s software, Nationwide was able to provide a virtual copy of the systems for its third-party supplier to link to for the final testing.

While the cost savings on hardware, processing power and human resources are huge, the speed at which new services can be rolled out is as important. “If, for example, you can put a new current account out before your competitors, it is an advantage,” said Armstrong.

Building on initial success

The success of the internet banking testing project has raised the likelihood of the virtualised testing being used on other projects. Armstrong said the bank usually has more than 100 projects running at any one time, and Lisa is currently used in 6% to 10% of software projects.

“We are probably on the second rung of the ladder and will use this to test other projects,” he said.

Armstrong said winning over stakeholders was more of a challenge than the technology when the project was being proposed. “The technology is only one part of the challenge – the people are more difficult. The project was a bit scary for a company as old as Nationwide,” he said.

Since Nationwide’s rebuilt internet bank went live in October 2011, there have been no failures, said Armstrong. According to research from software quality tester Cast, which used automated analysis tools to analyse 365 million lines of code within 745 large software applications belonging to 160 companies in 10 countries, the average big application costs an extra £2.23m as a result of problems with the code that need to be fixed after software goes live.

As part of its £1bn IT transformation programme, Nationwide is using a virtualised environment to test its online banking system and has rolled out a mortgage application system to its branches.

The cost savings on hardware, processing power and human resources are huge

Nationwide has reached a major milestone in its five-year transformation project, with the roll-out of a mortgage application system to some 740 branches.

The migration to a new mortgage system, known as MSO, which cost more than £100m to complete, was the second largest single project within Nationwide’s £1bn technology transformation.

The MSO system takes paper out of the mortgage application process, reduces the time an application takes and, because it is based on commercial technology, makes future support and development easier.

Nationwide has now completed the implementation of its .Net-based mortgage origination and sales platform into its retail branches. The service will be available to customers via the Internet early next year, according to Nationwide director of business transformation Martin Boyle.

The MSO system was developed by software development company Avelo, in conjunction with Nationwide. The previous system, which was developed in-house, was difficult to support because the person who developed it had left the company, leaving it with a skills issue. “We moved to a commercial technology where skills are available,” said Boyle.

The platform had to be integrated into 77 different interfaces to automate the mortgage application process. Once a customer’s details are scanned in, everything else can be automated – with no more paper required.

Previously, it took 15 days from application to mortgage offer, but now about 60% of applications are dealt with in five days, with over 5% completed in one day.

Nationwide has also automated the process of keeping customers up to date with their applications via SMS messages.

Boyle said the business has brought peace of mind to customers, with an increase of 45% in the number of customers post purchase. As a result, the bank predicts a £20m boost to customer satisfaction.

The importance of the system to Nationwide is underlined by the fact that about 40 people tested it full-time for at least seven months.
Nokia is banking on Microsoft’s campaign but it may not be sufficient to save the handset maker, writes Jennifer Scott

Nokia has announced its second quarter results for 2012 – and they don’t make pleasant reading. A 19% drop in sales, a 39% fall in smartphone shipments and just four million Lumia devices shipped – compare with Apple, which sold 35 million iPhones in its last quarter – left the company’s CFO admitting the performance was not acceptable.

But CEO Stephen Elop has taken a forward-looking approach to the figures, still hopeful his former employer, Microsoft, will be the answer to Nokia’s woes.

“We established a preferred position with Microsoft right from the beginning and we have a very close and very communicative relationship,” Elop said.

The Windows 8 halo effect

As a follow-up to Nokia’s commitment to Microsoft’s Windows Phone 7 operating system (OSS), for which it ditched its Symbian platform last year, Elop now believes the release of the Windows Phone 8 mobile operating system, and the accompanying Windows 8 tablet and PC versions, will be the ticket to big sales and a resurgence of popularity for the Finnish handset manufacturer.

The idea is that, as customers get excited by the Windows 8 launch in October, they will want to spread that experience across all their devices, be it the Xbox or laptop at home, to the smartphone on the move.

“Windows Phone 8 will become familiar to people because of Microsoft’s huge advertising campaign,” said Elop. “It will have a halo effect for Nokia.”

Carolina Milanese, research vice-president at analyst organisation Gartner, agreed it could have the desired effect.

“The roll-out of Windows 8 on tablets and PCs will certainly help raise awareness of Metro [the user interface used by Windows Phone and Windows 8] among consumers and the marketing push on Windows 8 will rub off on Windows Phone 8, both in awareness with consumers and appeal to developers,” she said.

“Right now Nokia has to be focused. Working with Microsoft gives them financial support on platform evolution and marketing.”

Misplaced faith in Microsoft

But Nokia has misplaced its faith in Microsoft before. The dedication to Windows Phone 7 hasn’t yet led to the third ecosystem both companies were planning on in the mobile market, to take on the might of Apple and Google’s Android OS. Instead it has been a costly investment that has far from paid off, with relatively limited interest from consumers.

When Elop took charge of Nokia in 2010, the company sold 28 million smartphones and was the largest phone manufacturer in the world, based on device shipments.

But smartphone sales have fallen by almost two thirds since the commitment to Windows Phone and Samsung is now topping the table as the highest-selling phone maker.

As Milanese said, the added marketing dollars and focus that Microsoft will bring Nokia could prove a massive boost while it tries to make savings internally – including 10,000 job cuts and the closure of an R&D centre and a factory in Finland.

But Microsoft will be thinking about number one and with the launch of Surface, its own hardware for the tablet version of Windows 8, and the desire to get the operating system on as many laptops and PCs as possible, Nokia will not be Microsoft’s top priority.

Boost for competitors

And Nokia won’t be the only manufacturer creating handsets running Windows Phone software. Even with its special relationship with Microsoft, the likes of HTC and other manufacturers will be just as important – in making sales and spreading the word of Windows 8 – as Nokia, as well as receiving the same boost from Microsoft’s marketing campaign.

One of the few glimmers in Nokia’s results was its steady feature-phone business, which grew 2% year on year and shipped 73.52 million devices. While having much lower margins than high-end smartphones, the feature-phone market still keeps the high shipment volumes Nokia needs to keep its head above water.

As smartphone prices come down and emerging markets look to bigger, brighter handsets, feature phones may start to dwindle. But, while the market is still there, should this not be something to invest heavily in, rather than throwing money at high-end iPhone competitors that rarely win the battle? Or maybe the focus should be on Nokia’s low-end smartphones and making them a competitive alternative to feature phones.

Elop should beware of putting all his eggs in the Microsoft basket. It might pay off in the end, but it is a risk Nokia might not want to take if the manufacturer wants to see many more second quarters.

“We established a preferred position with Microsoft right from the beginning”

Stephen Elop, Nokia

Source: ComputerWeekly.com

More online

- Nokia smartphones bomb as sales drop 27%
- Nokia loses €3bn as Windows Phone partnership struggles
- Nokia mulls exclusive partnership with European operators
Quantum is a proven global expert in data protection and Big Data management that provides a unique combination of intelligent storage solutions and unmatched value for traditional, virtual and cloud environments.

Tel: 01344 353500 or visit www.quantum.com
Network security controls struggle to keep pace with wireless devices

The march of wireless technology means CIOs must review their network security measures, writes Warwick Ashford

Network security controls and practices are among the most mature, but can businesses be sure that some network traffic is not sneaking past traditional controls, especially with the proliferation of mobile wireless and other IP-enabled devices?

With the rise of mobile enterprise applications and related trends such as the consumerisation of IT and bring your own device (BYOD), an increasing number of enterprise employees are looking to access corporate networks through Wi-Fi hotspots, internally and externally.

Whether or not these Wi-Fi hotspots increase the potential of data leakage depends mainly on an organisation’s strategy for network security. If organisations continue to rely on traditional controls as a key control in the protection of their data, Wi-Fi is a potential avenue for data leakage, according to Matthew Lord, chief information security officer at business services supplier Steria UK.

“An attacker could just sit in an organisation’s car park and try to force their way into the network by trying a combination of IDs and passwords until they gain access,” he said.

If enterprises are to use Wi-Fi safely, they must follow two data leakage prevention strategies: set them up as an internet hotspot with no access to internal systems; and use a stronger form of authentication such as client-side certificate authentication.

Internal Wi-Fi hotspots – where there are separate corporate and guest networks, and the corporate network has tight controls, including device authentication – are therefore generally not an issue for network traffic slipping past controls.

However, corporate users could be tempted to switch to the guest network where there are fewer or no controls, and that is where leakage could occur. Best practice would be to set up a guest network that requires temporary credentials to enable connections.

Public Wi-Fi hotspot dangers

Public Wi-Fi hotspots, such as those commonly provided by coffee shops, are typically unencrypted, which means any wireless sniffer or rogue wireless access point can get all the traffic because all the data packets are open. Therefore, data leakage prevention depends on how the mobile device accessing the network is protected and configured.

Best practice would be for public hotspots to move to WPA2 to encrypt each session and for businesses to allow access to internal networks only through a virtual private network (VPN) client, which means all a traffic sniffer would see is a stream of encrypted data packets. This also prevents traffic redirection and man-in-the-middle attacks associated with web access over https.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are typically at highest risk of data leakage through public Wi-Fi hotspots because they do not commonly use VPNs.

“SMEs often just open connections on the firewall to the mail server, maybe even the remote desktop protocol (RDP) server, requiring only a username and password. They don’t really check the consistency of the computer. SMEs are a real problem – they need to be educated and shown how easy in many cases it is to secure remote access,” said Vladimir Jirasek, security professional and member of Cloud Security Alliance, UK chapter.

3G and 4G hotspot security

Although kits do exist for setting up rogue base stations capable of intercepting 3G traffic, rogue Wi-Fi hotspots are a much more likely target, according to William Beer, director of information and cyber security at consultancy PwC.

While there are vulnerabilities in wireless mobile communication channels, Wi-Fi is easier to target because of all the built-in safeguards in 3G, which require more specific expertise and advanced hardware to intercept, representing a lower return on investment for hackers, he said.

Best practice for mobile devices that support 3G, high-speed packet access (HSPA) and Wi-Fi is to use voice-over-IP (VoIP) instead, and run a peer-to-peer call manager software to encrypt the traffic, according to Jirasek. This enables all traffic to be encrypted over an untrusted network, he said.

Another potential avenue of data leakage is the increasing number of IP-enabled devices in the enterprise, including printers, CCTV cameras, point-of-sale (POS) systems, building access and other control systems.

That most devices can operate on an IP network, coupled with most corporations’ need to save money today, inevitably means increasing use of the corporate network as a communications backbone for more than just file and print servers.

In light of this and the need to block as many avenues for data leakage as possible, organisations need to treat their internal networks as hostile and implement the right level of security on all networked devices.

“A good example would be to encrypt CCTV footage between the camera and the recorder or implement a hardened factory control server with a firewall on your network, rather than an unprotected workstation running system control software,” said Steria’s Lord.

Again, best practice is to separate different types of devices and apply different security controls accordingly, said Jirasek.

“You don’t want to put IP devices on the same domain or network as your computers. If they don’t need to talk to each other, they should not be able to,” he said.

This is an edited excerpt. Click here to read the full article online.
London Stock Exchange IT platform leads the world in trading services

CIO Antoine Shagoury is adding services to the LSE platform for exchanges all around the world, writes Karl Flinders

The London Stock Exchange is using its core technology to become an investment industry service provider, offering industrialised trading technology and direct trading services.

Antoine Shagoury joined the London Stock Exchange (LSE) in February 2010 as CIO. His first job was to oversee the replacement of legacy trading platform, Tradelect, with the system the LSE acquired when it took over Sri Lankan trading software maker MillenniumIT for £18m in September 2009.

He was recently appointed COO but retained his CIO role. His understanding of the technology will enable him to manage the integration of the exchange’s different businesses, which rely heavily on technology.

The CIO component of Shagoury’s role is split in two. On one hand he manages the technology that keeps the business running. Here he focuses on efficiencies. He spends 15% of his time on this and has about 70 IT staff globally working on projects such as the introduction of business intelligence tools and cloud-based CRM and collaboration software.

On the other hand he is in charge of the systems that drive the business, to which he dedicates considerably more of his time. He has about 1,000 staff in this part of the business – which includes the provision of software to other trading venues – of which 200 staff have been added only in the last two years. Most are Sri Lanka-based software developers.

Shagoury says less time is required for corporate IT, because it is more stable. As his operational role increases, he is looking to reduce his time spent on his corporate IT role, helping management in different divisions take on more responsibility.

“We will empower the leaders of different pillars of the business to take on a more strategic technology role,” says Shagoury.

Trading platform performance

In contrast, heading up technology at the exchange puts him in charge of customer-facing systems, none more important than the core trading platform. Since the LSE migrated to the MillenniumIT platform in February 2011, it has run smoothly. In the last 12 months it has had no downtime.

The certainty is in stark contrast to the last couple of years of the .Net-based Tradelect system, which experienced numerous high-profile outages. When LSE management realised Tradelect had reached the end of its life, it acted quickly to replace it.

Shagoury says the new trading platform provides certainty, continuity and capacity to customers. He is now looking to add services, using the same platform, to give customers industrialised packages adapted to fit their requirements.

“All of this is possible now the right technology is in place. In the past we were limiting the business that could be done,” says Shagoury. Today the Millennium software provides an extensible platform.

A few years ago, when new exchanges appeared known as Multilateral Trading Facilities (MTF), there was a race to be the fastest.

Reducing trading times is an important differentiator to investment firms that automate substantial volumes of trades. Milliseconds can make a sizable difference.

Today, after reducing latency to about 100 microseconds, from Tradelect’s 3.7 milliseconds, there is less focus on speed. But the exchange’s software teams are busier than ever developing software to give customers more services and confidence.

“We are improving latency all the time – but it is not about speed, but better risk control, reporting and data,” says Shagoury.

The exchange uses agile software development techniques to introduce services to its customers in days rather than months: “Over the last year we have created tighter working groups and teams,” says Shagoury.

Much of the focus is to push the technical capability of the core system to the periphery to improve tools such as those that collect and distribute data. It is hoped this will protect the market from risk-laden volatility.

Other ongoing developments include the introduction of common market and data access and embedding intelligence in hardware.

Industrialising technology

At the same time, the company’s software supplies business, MillenniumIT – which grew about 10% last year – is focused on industrialising trading technology.

Shagoury says the business wants to create systems that do not always have to be bespoke, but are flexible enough to be off-the-shelf.

“We can ask customers what bits they want and we put them together,” says Shagoury. But he says systems for the trading sector must enable exchanges to customise.

“We can provide a common solution and exchanges can customise it, so they don’t lose their identity.”

The business is picking up new customers all the time and, as more exchanges start using the MillenniumIT platform, the better the exchange becomes at migrations.

This is largely down to the industrialised nature of the software. As well as moving its own trading venues onto MillenniumIT, such as Milan-based exchange Borsa Italiana, it has also recently moved the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and Mongolian Stock Exchange to the platform.

“We are getting faster and faster delivering systems because it is industrialised,” adds Shagoury.

This is an edited excerpt. Click here to read the full interview online.

No system can provide absolute security under all conditions. Requires an Intel Identity Protection Technology–enabled chipset, Azureware, software, and participating websites. Consult your system manufacturer. Intel assumes no liability for lost or stolen data and/or systems or any resulting damages. For more information, visit http://ipt.intel.com. 3 Intel vPro technology available on select Intel Core processors. For availability, consult your system manufacturer. For more information, see http://intel.com/technology/vpro. 4 No computer system can provide absolute security under all conditions. Built-in security features available on select Intel Core processors may require additional software, hardware, services, and/or an Internet connection. Results may vary depending upon configuration. Consult your PC manufacturer for more details. Copyright © 2012 Intel Corporation. All rights reserved. Intel, the Intel logo, Intel Core, and Intel vPro are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries. Other names and brands may be claimed as the property of others.

Learn more at intel.co.uk/pcsecurity.
Recession-hit UK gets major IT investment

As the Olympic Games finally opens in London this week, there are 300 or so highly skilled IT experts about to be put out of a job. Thanks to some of the leading lights of the new technology economy, they might not have far to look for a new employer.

Those 300 IT experts, currently employed in the IT department of London 2012 organiser Locog, will of course be rather busy over the next few weeks, part of a 5,000-strong technology team that includes 2,500 volunteers plus staff from the key Games IT suppliers, such as Atos, BT, Samsung and Acer.

Perhaps Amazon and Facebook should give them a call – the two US giants have announced major investments in London.

The social media firm is opening its first software engineering centre outside the US – a major coup for the UK’s IT skills base.

“London is a perfect fit for Facebook engineering – it’s a global hub, and it has a vibrant local start-up community with lots of great technical talent,” said Philip Su, who will head up the London team.

Amazon, meanwhile, is opening an eight-floor development centre, a move described as “a splendid feather in our cap” by London major Boris Johnson.

“London is a hotbed of tech talent, and testament to that fact is Amazon choosing the capital as the location for its new global digital media development centre,” said the site’s managing director, Paula Byrne.

But Amazon and Facebook may find recruitment competition closer to the Olympics home, with the news that the media centre in the Olympic Park will be turned into a datacentre and digital incubator after the Games, exploiting 600km of fibre and copper cabling in the building. The winning bidder, iCity, will create up to 6,600 jobs.

Elsewhere, the UK’s recession has deepened, with the latest GDP figures showing a further 0.7% contraction in the economy.

Given all these developments, if you were a government in desperate need of private-sector growth, what industry sector and which in-demand professional skills would you invest in?

“IT skills gap that we can use to influence a change in the education establishments across the country.”

Mortimer Spinks conducted a survey into the gender imbalance in IT as a quick, short-time piece of market research (click here for the results). We wanted insights into the ratio in industry, whether it is an issue people in the industry feel passionately about, what benefits would come from a more balanced industry, and why people who work in tech feel that the imbalance exists.

“Women identifying the top two reasons technology jobs are less attractive to them than they are to men as the ‘masculine/macho culture’, and that ‘being the only female in the team’ puts them off.

So what are people (predominantly male) doing to try to make their teams a welcoming and attractive place for women to work? What can they do? How high is “address the gender balance” on CIO/CTOs’ agenda when they’re growing their teams? How high should it be? How are we marketing our industry to our school students? Who is marketing our industry? If there is constantly rising youth unemployment and a rising number of technology vacancies in the UK, who is working to match these two together?

While the survey does not try to answer these questions, it certainly provokes them and many more.

When approaching a subject like this, trepidation is wrong – what is right is courage and collaboration; with both, we hope the answers will come.

James Hallahan is managing director of Mortimer Spinks

Addressing the IT gender imbalance with courage

Gender balance, equality, diversity – these all feel like themes that you have to discuss with some trepidation, the sort of subjects that it is far easier to avoid than to discuss, let alone act on.

In October 2011, Mortimer Spinks ran its annual technology event in Soho, with 136 external guests, all technology professionals in senior management. The next day, some of them blogged about the event:

“Technology needs more women, not only to address the talent shortage, but because FTSE 100 companies with more women board directors are proven to perform better. Some 97% of the Mortimer Spinks technology event attendees were male, white and 30 to 50 years old.”

One comment following the blog read: “There are not enough women in technology – the event was a sausage fest and it spells trouble for the sector in the next five years.”

Is it natural to feel responsible in some way for the fact that there was an imbalance at the event? To feel, in some way, that the event was actually compounding the problem?

Mortimer Spinks helps pure tech businesses find technology professionals – the best technology professionals in the world. We work with a mix of global e-commerce power-houses, small tech start-ups and pure tech SMEs. They all demand the very best talent in the market.

We asked all our consultants how many women they had placed in the past six months. Responses varied between “none” and “hardly any”. When asked why, the response was, “there aren’t any”. The technology skills gap is the next theme or point that has led us to where we are now – a potentially massive hindrance to the IT industry.

It is true that not enough people are choosing science, technology, engineering and maths subjects for further education and related work.

What is more pertinent and more worrying – but potentially the solution to the skills gap is – the fact that the figures around women pursuing computer science are even lower. So low, it is fair to say we are only tapping into 50% of the potential talent.

So where does all this take us? Well, as a business it takes us to a number of different destinations united under the bracket of effecting change. We’re working with female school students on projects that try to inspire 11-14-year-old girls to realise the possibilities technology could offer. We’re working with Microsoft to get some “bullet-proof” data on the tech skills gap that we can use to influence a change in the education establishments across the country.

Mortimer Spinks helps pure tech businesses find technology professionals – the best technology professionals in the world. We work with a mix of global e-commerce power-houses, small tech start-ups and pure tech SMEs. They all demand the very best talent in the market.

Addressing the IT gender imbalance with courage

“IT skills gap that we can use to influence a change in the education establishments across the country.”

Mortimer Spinks conducted a survey into the gender imbalance in IT as a quick, short-time piece of market research (click here for the results). We wanted insights into the ratio in industry, whether it is an issue people in the industry feel passionately about, what benefits would come from a more balanced industry, and why people who work in tech feel that the imbalance exists.

Women identifying the top two reasons technology jobs are less attractive to them than they are to men as the ‘masculine/macho culture’, and that ‘being the only female in the team’ puts them off.

So what are people (predominantly male) doing to try to make their teams a welcoming and attractive place for women to work? What can they do? How high is “address the gender balance” on CIO/CTOs’ agenda when they’re growing their teams? How high should it be? How are we marketing our industry to our school students? Who is marketing our industry? If there is constantly rising youth unemployment and a rising number of technology vacancies in the UK, who is working to match these two together?

While the survey does not try to answer these questions, it certainly provokes them and many more.

When approaching a subject like this, trepidation is wrong – what is right is courage and collaboration; with both, we hope the answers will come.

James Hallahan is managing director of Mortimer Spinks

"There are not enough women in IT – the event was a sausage fest and that spells trouble"
Interested? Have a look at www.ScanSnapit.com/cw1

I need to carry my work with me, that includes all these documents!

Ah! There’s a ScanSnap. It’s so small and fast! Let me try...

...how easy! Just press the blue button and scan to… everywhere!

Now I have my documents ready whenever or wherever I need them.

On my notebook when in a meeting or at my desk from my home office,

on my Android® tablet or iPad® at lunch break or on the airplane,

and even on my smartphone thanks to the ScanSnap App*! I just love it!

Interested? Have a look at www.ScanSnapit.com/cw1

shaping tomorrow with you

All names, manufacturer names, brand and product designations are subject to special trademark rights and are manufacturer’s trademarks and/or registered brands of their respective owners. All indications are non-binding. Technical data is subject to change without prior notification. Apple, iPad, iPhone, iPod touch, and iTunes are trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. App Store is a service mark of Apple Inc., Google, Google Docs and Android are registered trademarks or trademarks of Google Inc.

* Available for iPad®, iPhone® and Android® 2.2 or later; details on our website.
How to make sense of the big data universe

The prospect of analysing big data can appear daunting, so here Clive Longbottom looks at what data you need, where to find it and how to break it down into manageable, meaningful chunks.

As is the way with IT, as soon as one bandwagon begins to be understood by the general public, another one has to be rolled out. In this case, as cloud computing starts to become more of a reality, big data is rearing its head as – depending on the commentator – the next greatest opportunity or threat to the organisation.

As there was with cloud, there’s a lot of confusion out about big data. Many of the database vendors tried to play big data as purely having a lot of data in one or more databases. But that is not big data, it’s large data – a problem that can be handled with database federation, standard business intelligence and analytics.

Next, it was said to be a mix of data held in the organisation that needed to be brought together so decision makers could see everything the organisation held around a specific topic to make better informed decisions – but only through whatever information the organisation was already aware of. So if the organisation wasn’t already aware of something, that was to be excluded from the results – see the problem here?

Many technology companies – aided by the PR organisations employed to monitor their brands – pushed the idea that big data was moving towards the field of social networking. They said big data was all about using the wisdom of the crowd and identifying the sentiment of the masses.

But social networking has not usurped much that went before, so any solution still has to include all the information feeds such as e-mail, call recordings, customer relationship management (CRM) records, scanned documents and so on.

All the approaches cover some aspect of big data, but they all miss the point as well. The best, simple definition of big data comes down to volume, velocity and variety.

The volume aspect of big data is actually the one that is the least important. Big data is not about petabytes of data – it can be down to relatively small volumes that need to be dealt with in a manner that requires a big-data approach.

However, for most organisations, big data will involve bringing together many different data and information sources which, by their nature, will tend to result in the overall amount of data under consideration being big. Therefore, volume is not something that is under the direct control of the organisation – what has to be considered is how the volume of data that ends up being analysed is minimised, (more on this later).

Again, the velocity aspect of big data may well be a moot point – everyone...
Even the largest organisations will have little control over anything beyond a small percentage of the total available data. The two-edged sword of the internet raises its ugly head in that it does provide massive extra information resources – but then again, it also includes a massive amount of dross that doesn’t add anything to the sum knowledge of an organisation.

So how are we to deal with this real big data challenge, without running into Dilbert’s pointy-haired boss’s dictat, “Just run me off a copy of the internet”?

Storage and structure
Storage needs must be fully considered. EMC, NetApp and Dell are now talking about object, block and file storage, rather than focusing purely on high-performance database object storage to cover the various types of big data that needs to be controlled. Other storage vendors, such as Nutanix, Conaid, Amplidata and FusionIO provide systems that focus on one aspect of big data, partnering where necessary to cover others.

The need for structure around semi- or unstructured data is leading to an explosion in interest in noSQL-based databases, such as Apache Cassandra, 10gen MongoDB, CouchDB and so on. Systems such as Apache’s Hadoop, (which enables a massively scaled-out platform for providing distributed processing for large amounts of data), can use MapReduce, (the use of “chunking” data analysis into packets of work that can be dealt with in a parallel manner across a large resource pool), approaches to minimise the amount of information that needs to be dealt with.

What is being aimed for here is to take the seemingly infinite amount of available data and filter it down into manageable chunks. Standard internet searches can feed into a Hadoop-based system, which can then act as a feed into either standard SQL-based database or into a noSQL-based one, depending on the type of information being dealt with.

Extra information can be added automatically via rules engines or manually, as required, as metadata that adds to the value of the information stored. Once the information is held in a recognised form, it is then down to being able to apply the right form of data analysis against it to provide suitable feeds to the decision maker.

This is where the main problems still reside, but much work is being carried out. Unsurprisingly, a lot of this is coming from the incumbent business intelligence suppliers, such as SAS Institute, QlikTech, JasperSoft as well as those who have gained entry to the market through acquisition such as IBM (Cognos, SPSS), SAP (Business Objects) and Oracle (Hyperion, Endeca).

The storage suppliers are also making plays in the space – EMC acquired GreenPlum and Dell continues to acquire companies that will help it create a more cohesive and complete big data approach.

Buyer dos and don’ts
The key for buyers is to treat big data as a journey. Set short- and medium-term targets of what is required and then put in place solutions that help to move towards these targets.

Don’t put in place anything that is not well thought out at a measured pace, leveraging existing systems in conjunction with new systems. It just needs a strategic plan built from careful planning – and an eye to the long-term future.

Clive Longbottom is a director of analyst organisation Quocirca

* wants results against their analysis of available data in as short a period as possible. However, everything is relative – for example, every millennium added to providing results to a financial market trader can cost millions of pounds, whereas someone tracking variations in the global movement of tectonic plates may not be that worried if results take a few seconds to come through.

The one aspect that really matters is the variety of the information. Big data is all about the mix of data and where it is held at any time. Here, formal databases under the organisation’s direct control are only a very small component of the overall mix. There are all the office documents held as files across the organisation and you may need to include voice and video files as well.

Then there’s the information held in the value chain of suppliers and customers – information that is critical to the process or service being provided, yet isn’t under the organisation’s direct control. Then, there may well be a requirement to include information from the various social networks out there – and whatever approach is taken has to be inclusive.

Inclusivity of data sources
For example, it is pointless constructing something that is Facebook-specific, if most comments are appearing as hashtags in Twitter.

Further, it’s a waste of time writing multiple connectors to cover all of today’s social networks – remember MySpace, Bebo and Second Life? They were all the darlings of their time, but have faded to a withered existence or almost non-existence as newer players have taken over.

Sites such as Pinterest are showing signs of major interest – yet this was also the case with Google+, which more resembles a Western desert than a viable, active social network, still residing, but much work is being carried out. Unsurprisingly, a lot of this is coming from the incumbent business intelligence suppliers, such as SAS Institute, QlikTech, JasperSoft as well as those who have gained entry to the market through acquisition such as IBM (Cognos, SPSS), SAP (Business Objects) and Oracle (Hyperion,Endeca).

The storage suppliers are also making plays in the space – EMC acquired GreenPlum and Dell continues to acquire companies that will help it create a more cohesive and complete big data approach.

Buyer dos and don’ts
The key for buyers is to treat big data as a journey. Set short- and medium-term targets of what is required and then put in place solutions that help to move towards these targets.

Don’t put in place anything that could result in a need for major fork-lift upgrades at a later date – embrace open standards, look for suppliers who espouse heterogeneity in storage systems and in tooling, as well as an approach that covers a hybrid mix of private and public clouds.

Don’t fall for any supplier who says that the world is moving to or from “standard” SQL-based databases – the move is to a mixed environment of a Hadoop-style system paired with SQL and noSQL-based systems. Look for business analytics packages that enable links to be made to data sources of any kind that reside anywhere on the internet, and that can link into semi-structured systems such as social networking sites in a meaningful manner.

Big data may appear to be just another bandwagon at this stage – but it is important, and needs to be addressed carefully and sensibly, rather than in a build-in-a-china-shop manner that seems to be pushed by many vendors. The journey can be carried out at a measured pace, leveraging existing systems in conjunction with new systems. It just needs a strategic plan built from careful planning – and an eye to the long-term future.

Clive Longbottom is a director of analyst organisation Quocirca
Your IT people need reliable answers—fast. Whether they’re managing your next big project, preparing for certification exams, or solving problems on the go, they need information you can trust. Like learning content from SkillSoft. Search books from leading IT publishers for just-in-time answers. Learn new technologies with courses, virtual instructor-led training, and mentoring from certified experts. When you partner with SkillSoft, you can expect current, authoritative content and unparalleled service. You’ll benefit from our experience developing award-winning IT learning content and programs. See for yourself. Click here for a sample Live Learning™ class, The Modern Approach to Cisco CCNA Subnetting.
There is near-consensus across industries as to which big data sets are most valuable. The Economist Intelligence Unit conducted a survey, completed in February 2012, of 607 executives. Participants hailed from across the globe, with 38% based in Europe, 28% in North America, 25% in Asia-Pacific and the remainder coming from Latin America and the Middle East and Africa.

Fully 69% of survey respondents agree business activity data (for example, sales, purchases, costs) adds the greatest value to their organisation. The only notable exception is consumer goods and retail, where point-of-sale data is deemed the most important (cited by 71% of respondents). Retailers and consumer goods firms are arguably under more pressure than other industries to keep their prices competitive. With smartphone apps such as RedLaser and Amazon’s Price Check, customers can scan a product’s barcode in-store and immediately find out if the product is available elsewhere for less.

Office documentation (e-mails, document stores, etc) is the second most valued data set overall, favoured by 32% of respondents. Of the other major industries in the survey, only healthcare, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology differ on their second choice. Here social media are viewed as the second most valuable data set, possibly because reputation is vitally important in this sector and “sentiment analysis” of social media is a quick way to identify shifting views towards drugs and other healthcare products.

Social media

Over 40% of respondents agree that using social media data for decision-making has become increasingly important, possibly because they have made organisations vulnerable to “brand damage”.

Social media are often used as an early warning system to alert firms when customers are turning against them. In December 2011 it took Verizon Wireless just one day to make the decision to withdraw a $2 “convenience charge” for paying bills with a smartphone, following a social media-led consumer backlash.

Customers used Twitter and other social media to express their anger at the charge. Verizon Wireless was prompt in responding to the outcry, possibly forestalling customer defection to rival mobile operators.

But not all unstructured data is as easy to understand as social media. Indeed, 42% of survey respondents say unstructured content – which includes audio, video, e-mails and web pages – is too difficult to interpret.

A possible reason for this is that today’s business intelligence tools are good at aggregating and analysing structured data while tools for unstructured data are predominantly targeted at providing access to individual documents (for example, search and content management). It may be a while before the more advanced unstructured data tools – such as text analytics and sentiment analysis – which can aggregate and summarise unstructured content, become mass market.

This could be why 40% of respondents say they have too much
unstructured data to support decision-making, next to just 7% who say they have too much structured data.

Structured or unstructured, most executives feel they don’t have enough data to support their decision-making. In fact, 40% of respondents overall believe the decisions they made in the past three years would have been significantly better if they’d had all of the structured and unstructured data they needed to make their decision. And, despite the fact that respondents from the financial services and energy sectors are more likely than average to describe their firm as data-driven, they are also more likely than the average (46% from financial services and 48% from energy) to feel the data they have made better decisions if the needed data was to hand.

On first appearance, this may seem contradictory, given the surfeit of data and the difficulty organisations face in managing it, but Bill Ruh, vice-president of software at GE sees no contradiction.

"Because the problems we address are getting more and more complex, we’re going to solve more complex problems as a result,” he says.

“What we find is the more data we have, the more we get innovation in those analytics and we begin to do things we didn’t think we could do.”

**Decision automation**

For Ruh, the journey to data fulfillment will be over when he can put a sensor on every component GE sells and monitor it in real time.

In this way, any aberrant behaviour can be immediately identified and either corrected through a control mechanism (decision automation) or through human intervention (decision support).

“We’re trying to get to what we would call ‘zero unplanned outages’ on everything we sell,” says Ruh.

Across all industries and regions, most survey respondents concur there is scope for further decision automation at their organisation. Over 60% of respondents dispute the proposition that most operational/tactical decisions that can be automated, have been automated.

This view is fairly consistent across industries, although fewer healthcare and pharmaceuticals companies agree with the statement (52%) than manufacturing companies (68%). (Respondents from the education sector also appear less certain than peers elsewhere that there is much still to be automated.)

There is some regional variation, too. No more than 54% of executives in Asia-Pacific believe the job of automation is incomplete, compared with 71% in Western Europe.

Ruh says: “One reason is that many of the environments we operate in are highly regulated, so we have to move at a speed that makes sense within the regulation,” he says.

“The second is because the sensors and the data weren’t really there to automate anything.”

Certainly decision-automation tools have evolved from simple “if then else” programmable statements (for example: “If credit rating < AAA, then approve loan, else reject”) to sophisticated artificial intelligence programs that learn from successes and failures. The more sophisticated the tools become, the more decisions that can be automated.

Decision automation, however, can introduce unnecessary rigidity into business processes. At times of high instability – such as the current economic climate – companies need to be nimble to adapt to changing conditions. Hard-coded decisions can be costly and take time to change.

The biggest impediment to effective decision-making using big data – cited by 56% of survey respondents – is “organisational silos”. This appears especially the case for larger organisations with annual revenue over $10bn, whose executives are more likely to cite silos as a problem (72%) than smaller firms with less than $500m in revenue (43%).

**Mind the skills gap**

A big impediment to making better decisions with big data is the dearth of skilled staff to analyse it, an issue mentioned by 51% of respondents.

For consumer goods and retail firms, it is the single toughest obstacle, cited by two-thirds of respondents from those sectors.

Some experts Capgemini spoke to believe that, in terms of modelling, there will be a considerable shortage of specialists, especially in the analytics domain.

According to Ruh of GE, “There is going to be a war for this kind of talent in the next five years.”

Aside from a master’s degree or PhD in economics, mathematics, physics or other relevant field of science, analysts are expected to have in-depth domain knowledge, which usually takes years to acquire.

Interviewees for the report say the ideal analyst should have an ability to communicate complex ideas in a simple manner and should be customer-focused. Finding people with all of these abilities is never going to be easy and retaining them is going to be even harder, as the benefits of big data become apparent to more firms.

Technology companies recognise the problem and are working with schools and universities to develop these much-needed skills. For example, SAS, a business analytics software firm based in Cary, North Carolina, developed Curriculum Pathways, a web-based tool for teaching data analytics to high school students. The course, aimed at science, technology, engineering and mathematics students, has been running for 12 years in the US and is used in 18,000 schools; it will be offered to UK schools, for free, from March 2012. SAS has also developed advanced analytics courses with a number of universities, including Centennial College, Canada, North Carolina State University and Saint Joseph’s University, Philadelphia, to provide the next generation of data analysts.

The time it takes to analyse large data sets is seen as another major impediment to more effective use of big data in decision-making.

“I think big data is going to stimulate the need for more CPU power, because people are going to get very creative and they’re going to invent new algorithms, and we’re going to say ‘My God, everything’s slow again’, ” says Ruh of GE.

“We are going to have to redo our compute and storage architectures, because they will not work where all this is going.”

**The future of big data**

Alex Pentland, director of the Human Dynamics Laboratory at MIT, says big data is turning the process of decision-making inside out. Instead of starting with a question or hypothesis, people mine data to see what patterns they can find. If the patterns reveal a business opportunity or a threat, then a decision is made about how to act on the information.

This is certainly true, but improvements in computing power and artificial intelligence systems mean that asking direct questions of big data and getting an answer, in real time, is now a reality.

Although these systems are still very costly and not widely deployed, this research suggests that the appetite for real-time decision-making is huge. And when there is a business demand, it is only a matter of time before the need is fulfilled.

Rob Toguri is vice-president of business information management at Capgemini

This is an edited excerpt. Click here to read the full report

Click here to see the full The Computer Weekly research library archive

---

**More online**

- [Big data roundtable webcast: Gaining value from big data](#)
- [Using semantic technology to turn big data into smart data](#)
- [Dealing with big data: The storage implications of big data](#)
Northumbria is one of the UK’s most innovative and dynamic universities with an ambitious vision for the next decade. Our aim is to be known as a research-rich, business-focused, professional University with a global reputation for academic quality; significantly improving our already impressive position in national and international league tables. As the largest university in the North East Region we have an annual turnover of over £210 million, engage 33,000 students, employ over 3,000 members of staff and make a significant and growing contribution to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing regionally, nationally and internationally.

The Board of Governors are seeking to recruit new independent Governors with responsibility for overseeing the strategic direction, performance and sound management of the University. You will play and active and important role in the life of the University, embracing our values and supporting achievement of our vision and aims.

You will have held, or currently hold, significant responsibility in your own professional or business sphere and have the ability to apply your professional expertise to contribute to the Board’s oversight of University affairs. The Board are particularly keen to receive applications from candidates who are commercially aware and financially literate, with expertise in financial and risk management and audit, or IT strategic development.

Applications are welcomed from all suitably qualified individuals particularly from underrepresented areas of the community, such as disabled, ethnic minority and female applicants.

For further information about this exciting opportunity, or to make an application please visit our website www.northumbria.ac.uk/joinourboard
Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer unveiled the new Office on 16 July 2012 in San Francisco, describing it at the “biggest, most ambitious release in our history”.

It is a multi-faceted release. The look and feel of the user interface has been redone in the Metro style of Windows Phone and Windows 8, though most of the applications still run on the traditional Windows desktop. Links to the cloud have been increased, with a focus on social collaboration as well as internet storage. Microsoft is also trying to shift businesses to a subscription model for Office, with a generous limit of up to five installations per user, including both Windows and Mac versions if required.

Office 2013 is a suite of 11 applications – Access, Excel, InfoPath, OneNote, Outlook, Project, Lync, Publisher, Visio and Word – all of which have been reworked with a Metro-style user interface. In addition, Microsoft has developed native Windows 8 Metro-style apps for OneNote and Lync. Some editions do not include all applications.

**Office 365**

Another key piece of the Office family is SharePoint, deployed either on-premise or in the cloud. Office 365 is Microsoft’s own implementation of hosted SharePoint and Exchange.

Customers who subscribe to an Office 365 bundle which includes Office 2013 will be able to download the desktop applications from the web. Microsoft has announced four new bundles. Home Premium has 20GB of storage and includes Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook, OneNote, Access and Publisher. Small Business Premium adds InfoPath and Lync, for up to 10 users. ProPlus is similar, but covers up to 25 users. Enterprise Premium has the same applications, but adds archiving and legal hold support, as well as unlimited users.

When users download an application, there is an option to do so using click-to-run application virtualisation instead of a standard full install. This speeds deployment and should also reduce potential application conflicts.

**OneNote on Metro**

The migration of Office to the Windows 8 platform is a process, not an event, and Microsoft is further ahead with some applications than others. A favoured application is OneNote, which has a true native Windows 8 app as well as a desktop version.

The Metro version of OneNote includes what Microsoft calls a radial menu for applying formatting to text. This is a sophisticated control that is designed for touch, and demonstrates the value of a native Windows 8 application. Microsoft is not announcing any specific plans, but it seems plausible that more native Metro apps will be included in subsequent Office releases.

**Word 2013**

Word 2013, like the other Office 2013 applications, has a redesigned ribbon control inspired by Metro, even though it is a desktop application. One of the goals is to be easier to use with touch, though in this case some of the icons are still too small to hit easily on a tablet with a small screen, such as the Samsung 11.6in Slate, on which Microsoft often demonstrates Windows 8 and Office 2013. That said, it is an improvement over Office 2010 for touch users. Microsoft’s dilemma is that if it removes more controls from the ribbon then there would be more to learn for users with Office 2007 or 2010.

The Insert tab in the ribbon includes what Microsoft calls Apps for Office. This is for applications written to a JavaScript application programming interface (API) that is new in this version. Such apps can be embedded as content in a document, or run alongside the document in a task pane. They are written in...
**Microsoft Office 2013**

**Excel 2013**
Excel 2013 has several new features. Flash Fill attempts to learn the pattern when you add a new column based on one or more existing columns, and will fill the column automatically according to that pattern.

Spreadsheet Inquire and Compare is an add-in that scans spreadsheets for errors such as broken links. Recommended Charts is where Excel will suggest a chart that is suitable for the current data.

**Outlook 2013**
Outlook 2013 has a new pop-up “peek” option using a menu at the bottom left of the application window. The mail application also connects to the internet to show forecasted weather for calendar dates, an example of using a web service to enhance a desktop product.

Another new feature is MailTips, a notification that appears when Outlook detects a potential error, such as forgetting to attach a file, but referring to an attachment in the message. Users testing Outlook 2013 can install it side by side with earlier versions.

**PowerPoint 2013**
PowerPoint 2013 has more changes than most of the Office applications. The Presenter View, designed for multi-screen set-ups where the user can use a separate display to manage a slide show, now includes the ability to zoom in and out of specific parts of the screen, a navigation grid for slides, and a one-click option to swap displays between Presenter View and the presentation itself.

There is a new start screen for setting up documents, with themes and templates, enhanced alignment guides, the ability to merge two shapes into one, and the option to add pictures direct from internet services such as Flickr.

In common with other Office 2013 applications, PowerPoint saves by default to the cloud, if the user is signed into an online account. This enables presentations to be shared by sending out the link, subject to the assigned permissions.

**Touchscreen operation**
During the demo event, Microsoft corporate vice-president Kirk Koenigsbauer showed Office 2013 on an 82in touchscreen made by Perceptive Pixel, a company recently acquired by Microsoft.

Perceptive screens support 10 points of multi-touch, enabling rich gesture support. With such a screen, users can operate Windows 8 and Office 2013 standing up, using effects such as pinch and zoom to highlight key points or enlarge image details. It can also be used collaboratively, adding annotations with touch. The screens are expensive, but the company is promising to bring the price down when possible.

**Social enterprise**
The SharePoint Newsfeed is an activity feed in SharePoint team sites. Users can post messages, “Like” posts, and follow contacts or documents. They can get e-mail alerts when SharePoint is new to a subject to which they have subscribed.

This is where Microsoft is bringing elements familiar from sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+ into SharePoint, a private, managed environment. Microsoft’s acquisition of Yammer and Skype is behind some of the social networking and communication features in Office 2013.

Users can integrate Lync with Skype and aggregate existing contacts.

SkyDrive Pro is a new feature of SharePoint which gives each user their own storage area with a user interface similar to that of the public SkyDrive service. A key feature of SkyDrive Pro is that users can synchronise files with a PC for offline support. This synchronisation is based on an Explorer add-in, so that it appears as a folder on the PC, rather than using the SharePoint Workspace feature first introduced in Office 2010. SharePoint Workspace is also present in the preview, suggesting that these different approaches to offline support will co-exist.

**Office web apps**
The web apps for Office, a feature of SharePoint, are enhanced in the 2013 wave. As with the desktop applications, the ribbon user interface is optimised for touch input. A button near the top left lets users move the ribbon icons further apart to offer a bigger target for fingers.

The web apps play a key role in enabling document sharing on non-Microsoft devices such as those running Apple iOS or Google Android. Although the company is rumoured to be working on iOS apps for Office, nothing was announced at the press launch in San Francisco. Rather, Microsoft points to the web apps as a way to access and edit documents in the Safari browser.

**Microsoft ambitions**
Office 2013 is critically important for Microsoft. The dominance of Office in business is its strategic asset in the battle with iOS and Android. Microsoft’s goal is to take on the iPad with devices that are equally convenient and easy to use, but without compromising capability – the ability to run full Office addresses the second part of that ambition.
Reduce your IT recruitment costs by up to 75%

You could recruit two or three QA Apprentices for the cost of one graduate salary

“One of the reasons that we justified our second apprentice was the speed that the first apprentice was useful to the business, and that we could start covering the costs of employing and training them.”

Rupert Squires – Operations Director, Perspicuity

QA Apprenticeships work for your business

» Microsoft – IT Systems & Networking
» Software & Web Development – .NET, Java and more

Find out more at apprenticeships.qa.com/it

t: 0845 074 7825  
e: employanapprentice@qa.com
iPhone can really pack a punch

Smartphones already provide a vast toolkit in your pocket, and soon that arsenal could include the ability to take down a violent attacker. No, not a new app, but a cunningly crafted case, initially designed for the iPhone 4, which includes a 650,000-volt stun gun.

Named Yellow Jacket after a species of predatory wasp, the case has its own external battery, capable of giving the smartphone up to 20 additional hours of standby capacity.

Inventor Seth Froom was inspired by an armed robbery at his home, during which he was caught unarmored and unable to fight back. He came up with the idea for Yellow Jacket because most people have their mobile phones with them, wherever they are, whatever they are doing.

While the Yellow Jacket may not go down well with ultra style-conscious iPhone users, it does provide desperately needed battery life and conscious iPhone users, it does provide a new app, but a cunningly crafted case, initially designed for the iPhone 4, which includes a 650,000-volt stun gun.

Stun guns are legal in the US, but there is a fairly long list of countries where they are not, and yes, you guessed it, the UK is on that list. Elsewhere, Yellow Jacket’s developers are looking for funding and are offering early bird specials for iPhone 4 and 4S owners. Versions for other models of smartphone will follow.

Elvis lives on planet football

Downetime was delighted to learn that telecommunications analyst Windsor Holden has a secret second life. By day, Windsor writes about telecoms, communications and mobile payments for analyst company Juniper Research. On evenings and weekends, he writes, er, books about Elvis Presley and aliens.

Windsor has just published his first novel, Elvis lives on planet football. It’s the story of two 21st-century things with an appetite for beer and women, and an aversion to housework. Needless to say, they get tangled up in a plot featuring Leeds United, a clandestine government agency, and the king of rock and roll, evidently still alive and hanging out in Yorkshire.

Think it wouldn’t happen? Well, I have it on good authority that Jerry Lee Lewis is working as a parking attendant in Brighton. Makes you think.

Microsoft red-faced over ‘big boobs’ in software code

Microsoft has been hit by another embarrassing disclosure that highlights a “boys club” culture at the firm.

Last year, the High Court heard claims that male executives had sexually harassed female colleagues, and this June the firm was forced to apologise for promoting its cloud computing services at a conference with an all-female song and dance routine it admitted was “vulgar” and “inappropriate”.

This time, Microsoft has had to apologise after developers uncovered a reference to “big boobs” hidden in software code written by the firm, according to the Telegraph.

The controversial string “0xB16B00B5”, a hexadecimal value, was found in software that allows Microsoft programs to work with open source operating system Linux.

It also emerged that a similar string, “0xB16B00B5” or “boobies”, appeared in an earlier version of the same code.

The revelation has prompted widespread criticism of Microsoft and debate over whether a “boys club” culture deters women from entering the software industry.

Microsoft holds hottest party in town

With the Olympics well underway, not only is London flooded with athletes, but also the rich and famous, who somehow managed to score tickets in the lottery – convenient hey?

And where there are celebrities, there are parties – and the hotspots of the capital will no doubt be rolling out the red carpet to squeeze them all in.

But it seems the hottest ticket in town is not for Mahiki or a table at The Ivy, it is on a yacht in Canary Wharf, owned by none other than Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.

Yes, even The Sun is reporting on the exclusive shindig, which claims to have Brad and Angelina on the list, as well as the lesser photographed Bill Gates.

We wonder whether Steve Ballmer will show up and make a show of himself. With that bellow you would be able to hear him from the Olympic park if he had one too many Pimms in the sunshine.

But, whoever does turn up, we are just glad the tech geeks are showing they don’t just know how to code, they can party too. Expect copies of Windows 8 in the goodie bags, and perhaps one of the many left over Nokia Lumias.

Elvis lives on planet football

Downetime was delighted to learn that telecommunications analyst Windsor Holden has a secret second life. By day, Windsor writes about telecoms, communications and mobile payments for analyst company Juniper Research. On evenings and weekends, he writes, er, books about Elvis Presley and aliens.

Windsor has just published his first novel, Elvis lives on planet football. It’s the story of two 21st-century things with an appetite for beer and women, and an aversion to housework. Needless to say, they get tangled up in a plot featuring Leeds United, a clandestine government agency, and the king of rock and roll, evidently still alive and hanging out in Yorkshire.

Think it wouldn’t happen? Well, I have it on good authority that Jerry Lee Lewis is working as a parking attendant in Brighton. Makes you think.

Microsoft red-faced over ‘big boobs’ in software code

Microsoft has been hit by another embarrassing disclosure that highlights a “boys club” culture at the firm.

Last year, the High Court heard claims that male executives had sexually harassed female colleagues, and this June the firm was forced to apologise for promoting its cloud computing services at a conference with an all-female song and dance routine it admitted was “vulgar” and “inappropriate”.

This time, Microsoft has had to apologise after developers uncovered a reference to “big boobs” hidden in software code written by the firm, according to the Telegraph.

The controversial string “0xB16B00B5”, a hexadecimal value, was found in software that allows Microsoft programs to work with open source operating system Linux.

It also emerged that a similar string, “0xB16B00B5” or “boobies”, appeared in an earlier version of the same code.

The revelation has prompted widespread criticism of Microsoft and debate over whether a “boys club” culture deters women from entering the software industry.

Microsoft holds hottest party in town

With the Olympics well underway, not only is London flooded with athletes, but also the rich and famous, who somehow managed to score tickets in the lottery – convenient hey?

And where there are celebrities, there are parties – and the hotspots of the capital will no doubt be rolling out the red carpet to squeeze them all in.

But it seems the hottest ticket in town is not for Mahiki or a table at The Ivy, it is on a yacht in Canary Wharf, owned by none other than Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.

Yes, even The Sun is reporting on the exclusive shindig, which claims to have Brad and Angelina on the list, as well as the lesser photographed Bill Gates.

We wonder whether Steve Ballmer will show up and make a show of himself. With that bellow you would be able to hear him from the Olympic park if he had one too many Pimms in the sunshine.

But, whoever does turn up, we are just glad the tech geeks are showing they don’t just know how to code, they can party too. Expect copies of Windows 8 in the goodie bags, and perhaps one of the many left over Nokia Lumias.
The #1 mistake made by #2 companies? Ignoring their machine data.

Our software turns your raw machine data into refined business insights by making sense of the systems that run your company—servers, website clickstreams, mobile devices and more. It’s what we call real-time operational intelligence—and why over half of the Fortune 100 use Splunk® software and have the business results to prove it.