

# Review of Microsoft Office:mac 2004

Having had Microsoft Office X on my trusty powerbook (Prismo firewire 2000) for some time now, I was eager to see if there had been any significant changes to Office with the release of Office:mac 2004.

I should mention that I also use Microsoft office 2003 (on a PC) at work, and am somewhat familiar with that version, also. A nice thing about the Mac version of Microsoft Office is that it isn't an exact clone of the Windows version. It does include Word, Excel and PowerPoint, naturally, and these are all compatible with Windows. (let's kill that "incompatible" myth) But we Mac users get some features that our Windows using friends don't. And the look of the interface, with the Mac OS graphics, is simply unmatched in the windows world.

At first glance I did not notice any outstanding differences between Office X and Office 2004. Most of the applications look very much the same at first. Even the intro screens are basically identical to those in Office X. But after exploring the suite for a while, I discovered a number of new and useful additions.

There is a New "toolbox" in Office 2004 that is available from Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, which gives us several new features that were not in the Office X version. It has a "scrapbook, which is a folder into which you can store Snippets of things you want for a particular project. These are accessed by clicking the toolbox icon in the toolbar which will bring down the Toolbox pane as a drop down window. From there one can simply drag and drop items into the document as needed. And there is something called the "Project Center" which links all the applications in Office to the new Entourage, the Office e-mail application, which in this version acts sort of like your "Project Manager".

Another feature in the Toolbox that any Mac user will appreciate is the "compatibility report". This examines your finished document or file, and tests it for compatibility with other versions of Microsoft Office. This is also available from the pull down Toolbox menu, and quickly tells you what problems may be present with your Document. The alert that I have gotten most often is "font substitution", which means, I assume, that I have used a font that may not be available on some other version of Office. One can, for example, change ones font, and run the compatibility test again, until no alert is given, insuring that the document will be rendered perfectly by other versions of the application.

Also in the Toolbox is an item called "Reference Tools", which gives you instant access to the Encarta World English dictionary, and to a Thesaurus. Nice!

There is a “Notebook feature in Word for taking quick notes. This includes a search option for sorting through your notes, and a user can even link audio recordings to notes. I tried using the Audio note feature, but just could NOT get it to work. The “record” button would NOT start the record function. I tried switching the input from my built in mic to my iSight, but no luck. I tried quitting the whole application and restarting it (a common fix for things that go wrong with our PC’s at work), but that did nothing. I tried so many things that I finally got the spinning beachball of death, and had to force my old powerbook into a hard restart. Finally I went to the Microsoft Mactopia website (<http://www.microsoft.com/mac/downloads.aspx>) and downloaded two updates for Office 2004. One was service pack 1 for Office 2004 (version 11.1.0 ) and the other was the 11.1.1 update. After installing these updates the audio recording feature worked fine, both with the iSight’s microphone and with the internal mic in my laptop. Kudos to Microsoft for finding and fixing this bug!

The audio record feature would be just the ticket for recording some ones detailed instructions during a meeting, while at the same time allowing one to type notes in the note pane to supplement or explain what was being said. Really cool..... But one might need a large hard drive and a fast processor if one wanted to record a full length college lecture. Nevertheless, that would be totally do-able. Windows users..... eat your heart out!

Word is a very large application with tons of functionality. It can do way more than AppleWorks, for example. But it can also be intimidating. For people that use it every day in their work, the fine points of using such a massive tool come to the user day by day, through interaction with co-workers, and sometimes even technical staff. After using Word for several hours a day every day, one accumulates a certain proficiency. This is quite a learning curve. For many of us, there are better and easier alternatives. AppleWorks is our old standby. And now we have Apples new “Pages” as another option. There are also several third party word processors available that have been highly rated. One can also use the basic TextEdit application that comes with every Mac for many of our needs.

That being said, there is really no substitute for Word if you want to do some really heavy document production, and it is just great that Microsoft has produced a Mac version of Word, that by almost every account, even reviews in PC publications, is a good bit better than the Windows version of the same name.

Although I am not an Excel user, I can see that the graphics are first rate in the Mac version, and have no counterpart in the Windows version of Office that I use at work.

Of course, as in the previous version, Entourage can handle all your e-mail. It is a robust e-mail application, and has a number of features that are not found in Apples “Mail”. It can be your calendar, and also your contact manager. When you start a “New Project”, Entourage creates a new folder in which it stores all of the files pertaining to that project, and this info can be viewed from any of the applications in Office using the “project

palette". You can assign a logo or other image to your project so you can quickly identify each project in your project center.

Entourage also comes with a junk mail filter, but I did not use it enough to compare it to the pretty darn good filter that comes with Apple's Mail. Entourage shows us another instance of having a lot of functionality at the expense of a lot of simplicity, and for me at least, I prefer the separate and simple approach of Apples Mail application. However, if you were a person who HAD to have a large list of clients, and HAD to manage a large amount of e-mail, you might find this part of the Office 2004 suite a "must have". Interestingly, and perhaps as a good indicator of the business focus of Microsoft, Entourage can show a five day "work week" view in its calendar. Something that iCal and most other calendars do not do.

I have used PowerPoint several times in the past, and have had no real gripes with it, but, as with the rest of this suite, PowerPoint 2004 also adds some nice graphic options, like transparency effects and graduated fills for graphs, and some nice transitions, and animations, too.

I happen to have Keynote, Apple's new presentation application, and although PowerPoint is still the 800 lb gorilla in the house, I have to say that I like watching a Keynote presentation better. It has much slicker graphics and effects, which are more interesting and eye catching. Some of PowerPoints graphics look 50's bland by comparison. But the new version Of PowerPoint has some things that are really nice. There is the "Presenter Tools" feature, for instance, that allows the presenter to see on the computer screen any prepared notes, as well as a timer, and thumbnails of the next slides, in addition to the actual slide show. On the projected screen, the audience sees only the slide show. The presenter can even edit the show as it is being given, without the audience knowing. I can see where THIS would be a nice feature.

The Windows version of Office includes an application called "Access", which is a data base application, (somewhat like FileMaker??)

The Mac version of Office does not have any such capability. This is not something that I personally would ever miss, but I do know that at my workplace we use a LARGE database every day that was made using Access. I suppose that in an enterprise environment, there would be a lot of need for this, but on a personal level, not much. Another example of the emphasis that windows place on users in the workplace.

I have been using Office 2004 for about five weeks now, and I have to say that I like it more than the Office X version that I have had for about the last two years. It is very stable, and has not yet hung up my nearly five year old powerbook. I especially like the compatibility test feature, and my wife was quite happy to find the presenter tools for a

powerPoint show that she had to give to a local group (since I installed the updates for the Audio notes).

Overall, I would have to concur with the vast majority of others who have reviewed this impressive suite, and recommend it highly. It is a lot better than the Office X version, and it is a lot better than the version made for Windows computers. What more could one want?

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