Microsoft News You Should Know

Three developments from Microsoft in 2025 will most likely affect lawyers and law firms, regardless of size. Microsoft is increasing the prices of some licenses; Windows 10 is reaching the end of its life; and there is a shift in branding from Microsoft 365 to Microsoft Copilot 365, and Microsoft's commitment to artificial intelligence (AI) is affecting these products.

BY JAMES PEARSON

A lot has happened within the Microsoft ecosystem in the first few months of 2025. Unfortunately, Microsoft is not always clear in its communications and is not known for making things easy for end users or even IT professionals to understand. Typically, the latest technical and installation documentation lags one or two versions behind the current software. Microsoft's products evolve more quickly than their documentation, and pricing and licensing structures have changed more times throughout my career than I care to remember.

Complicating matters further, Microsoft frequently adds, removes, and rebrands products, often changing their names. Hotmail became Outlook, Onedrive started as Skydrive, and Microsoft 365 is being rebranded as Microsoft 365 Copilot.

As with all software companies, other products are purchased and eventually integrated into or replaced by another. Yammer, acquired by Microsoft in 2012, was intended as an internal social media communication platform, but its features have now been integrated into Viva Engage.[1]

Skype is another example. Microsoft acquired Skype in 2011, Skype's features are now integrated with Teams, and Skype will retire in May 2025.[2]

Recently, Microsoft announced the discontinuation of Publisher, stating that its features can be found in other applications such as PowerPoint and Word. I can attest to having laid out entire products, including books and card games, using those applications. (I bet you didn't know I design games in my spare time.) If you're using Publisher, prepare for its discontinuation in October 2026.[3]

Three main changes warrant attention, as they will most likely affect lawyers and their firms, regardless of size: 1) Microsoft is increasing the prices of some licenses; 2) Windows 10 is reaching the end of its life; and 3) there is a shift in branding from Microsoft 365 to Microsoft Copilot 365, and Microsoft's commitment to artificial intelligence (AI) is affecting these products.

Microsoft Announces Price Increases

There seem to be announcements everywhere about price hikes, in response to inflation, demand, or fear and uncertainty regarding the effects of tariffs and the economy generally.

Microsoft is no exception, recently announcing that for subscribers who have annual plans with monthly payments, the license cost will increase by 5% at its next renewal date, effective from April 1.[4]

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Subscribers should work with their IT providers or whoever manages their Microsoft licensing or contact Microsoft directly to choose the appropriate billing option before renewal. Subscribers might consider paying upfront for an entire year for potential savings. Subscribers currently in an annual contract paying monthly can't cancel it before the contract's renewal date. Therefore, they might as well pay the full yearly amount upfront to take advantage of the 5% savings.

For businesses with more than three or four licenses or positions with high turnover, we recommend a strategy of having long-term license commitments for stable positions while maintaining a few month-to-month licenses for flexibility. This approach allows the lawyer or law firm to adjust licensing costs downward, if necessary, especially if frequent changes in staffing are anticipated. Subscribers with the more expensive monthly licenses (which are not increasing in price) should weigh staffing and license flexibility.

One way to offset increased fees is to eliminate duplicate services. Organizations often fall into the trap of using multiple overlapping tools, such as file-sharing applications included in both practice management software and Microsoft 365 subscriptions. To address this, audit your current software usage to identify any overlapping applications, such as Dropbox, that may be incurring additional costs. Additionally, review your Microsoft license benefits; you might have access to applications such as To Do, Visio, and Bookings that you are not currently using, are underutilized, or could replace a duplicate third-party product you are paying for.[5]

Renewal time is an ideal opportunity to reevaluate how your staff is using their Microsoft licenses and consider whether upgrading or downgrading is necessary. For instance, some users may only require an email mailbox, which is significantly cheaper than a full Microsoft Office suite. Various Microsoft 365 subscription options are available, each with different features. Review these options with your IT professional.

The End (of Windows 10) is Nigh!

Many people are still unaware that Microsoft will no longer support Windows 10 after Oct. 14, 2025. This deadline is just a few months away. It is important to understand that this situation is not negotiable.[6] (There are ways to pay Microsoft to extend support, but that would just delay the inevitable.)

When Microsoft ceases a product's support, it will stop providing technical assistance, developing new features, and, most important, releasing security patches. Cybercriminals often exploit security vulnerabilities in software long after its support has ended.

I hear excuses against upgrading devices, such as "that device is not used for critical tasks," "it does not connect to the internet," or "it's only used for one specific task." However, any device connected to your network, regardless of usage, poses a security risk. These excuses provide a false sense of security. If you must keep an outdated device on your network, discuss it with your IT professional; there are ways to mitigate, but not eliminate, the risks.

Hackers continue to discover security vulnerabilities in older software and exploit them to access networks and other devices connected to networks. Recently, researchers uncovered a vulnerability in Windows 7 that can bypass authentication protections, allowing hackers to gain access to network credentials. If you do not carefully segregate and manage unpatched devices on your network, they will always pose a security risk.[7]

For devices still running Windows 10, the options are to remove, replace, or upgrade those systems before October.

Upgrading existing systems might be economical, especially if they were purchased within the past three years. Because Windows 11 has new security features, it requires newer hardware that has security chips and compatible processors.

Before upgrading, users should consult their IT professional and device manufacturers to ensure all necessary software, hardware, and peripherals (printers, scanners, and other devices currently connected to their network) are compatible with Windows 11. A basic check of whether and how a system can be upgraded can be done by using the PC health checkup tool.[8]

An upgrade should be done as soon as possible after confirming compatibility. If multiple similar machines are available, consider having one as a test case to ensure all software works properly after the upgrade. Always back up computers in case they need to be restored later.

Microsoft lists its basic minimum system requirements for Windows 11. However, the minimum system requirements are abysmally low (they always are), and I am certain that if you use those as your baseline, you will be unhappy with the performance after the upgrade (if you aren't already).[9]

Consider investing in SSD drives to improve performance. For RAM, I generally recommend at least 16 GB of RAM, a Core i5 or equivalent processor, and an SSD drive. Storage needs will depend on the individual's usage and cloud uploads, but more storage is generally safer because it stems future upgrades.

Consider all the software you use. Porting older software to newer machines is becoming increasingly challenging. For example, a version of QuickBooks Desktop that is three years old or older will not transfer to a new computer because Intuit has announced the end of support for those versions.[10]

While shopping, consult an IT professional who understands your needs. Windows 11 Professional, rather than the Home version, should be purchased. Although the latter may save some money, it lacks essential security features and capabilities necessary for protecting law firms, such as hard-drive

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encryption (which should be enabled on all law firm devices). Upgrading later to a business version will incur additional costs and time.

Investing time and money in older machines might not be worthwhile. The results can be like pouring money into an old car that might never run right again. I always advise that people buy the best computer they can afford because most people regret opting for cheaper options that require later upgrades.

Microsoft 365 Gets a Rebranding

Another inevitable technological advance is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into seemingly every piece of software, from Windows itself to browsers and phones (Apple's Siri, Samsung's Bixby, and Google's Assistant got AI boosts this year).

Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, announced Copilot in 2023, discussing a vision of how people would work and interact with computers in the future. Microsoft continues to push that plan by rolling out its Copilot AI tools across its platform. Now, Microsoft has officially rebranded Microsoft 365 (which was Microsoft Office 365 until 2020) to Microsoft 365 Copilot.[11] The Microsoft 365 app is called the Microsoft 365 Copilot app across web, mobile, and Windows platforms. The new app name and icon began rolling out on Jan. 15, 2025. Microsoft will also redirect the web URL to m365.cloud.microsoft.com (previously office.com).

Existing users will see these changes automatically. However, I have noticed that as I spend more time using the browser versions of Microsoft's products and less time launching the apps, I sometimes must clear my web browser's cache when changes occur. This seems to be an annoying but necessary step with most browser-based software these days.

The concept of what Copilot is might be somewhat unclear as Microsoft continues to implement changes regarding billing, included features, and even the name. However, there are a few important distinctions between the different Copilot offerings and the available features. What you can access will depend on whether you are logged in with a work or school account or a personal account.

For example, Copilot Voice is the part of Copilot with which you can have spoken chats. (I love this product.) It's available as an app inside Edge and Windows and downloadable as an app. However, it has been called Copilot Chat and just Copilot.

Microsoft is in the process of rolling out its Copilot features. For users with work or school accounts, Copilot Chat is accessible at no extra cost for anyone holding a Microsoft 365 license. Meanwhile, for those with personal

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accounts, the company has announced that Copilot Chat will soon be available for subscribers of Microsoft 365 Personal and Family plans.

There are differences between the apps. The Microsoft 365 Copilot app (m365.cloud.microsoft.com) is designed for productivity tasks, enhancing efficiency and organization. It can draw data from both the web and a user's documents (securely).

In contrast, the standalone Microsoft Copilot app (copilot.microsoft.com) serves as an AI companion to assist users in their everyday lives with search, voice chatting, and similar tasks.

Microsoft 365 Personal and Family subscriptions also integrate Copilot into applications such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote, and the newly branded Microsoft 365 Copilot app. Copilot can assist with creating grocery lists and recipes in Word, help manage Excel budgets, create PowerPoint vacation slideshows, summarize emails in Outlook, and organize tasks in OneNote.

Microsoft Designer has also been included in these subscriptions, allowing users to create and edit images effortlessly. This tool features AI-powered object removal and can generate images based on descriptions, making it perfect for editing holiday photos or designing images for recipe collections. These enhancements aim to elevate the user experience and streamline productivity across various tasks.

The prices for Microsoft 365 Personal and Family subscriptions in the U.S. will increase by $3 per month at the next renewal for existing subscribers. Subscribers will also receive a monthly allotment of AI credits for using Copilot and Designer features.

Subscribers can unlock advanced AI features with a Copilot Pro license. This license is $20 per user (now available monthly and annually) for priority access, much like ChatGPT's paid product. Copilot Pro can be used in Microsoft's online apps, and in the desktop apps if you already have a Microsoft Personal or Family plan.

For even tighter integration, such as leveraging Copilot in your Microsoft desktop apps, analysis of business documents, and enterprise-grade data privacy and security, purchase Copilot for Business. Copilot for Business costs $30 per user on top of any qualifying Microsoft 365 subscription.

Ultimately, it boils down to determining the level of AI integration you and your team seek. The deeper and more robust the integration, the more likely you will need to add one of the Copilot subscriptions on top of what Microsoft currently includes in its base products.

However, this is in a state of flux, so be sure to review your usage and needs regularly.[12]

Conclusion

Like all software and hardware manufacturers, Microsoft is in an AI integration race, not only enhancing existing products but also creating new solutions that leverage AI to improve efficiency and user experience. Meanwhile, Microsoft is working diligently to rebrand products to reflect the company's focus.

Support for Windows 10 will end, necessitating a move to Windows 11 before October 2025. Windows 11 promises more security features and the obvious integration of Copilot to increase efficiency and "user experience."

Price increases are on their way, so take this opportunity to review all your subscriptions and services.

The Computer Center has created a free resource to go along with this article.[13] It contains additional infographics, videos, links and more to help you navigate Microsoft's changes. **WL**

ENDNOTES

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