What Every Microsoft Office User Should Know Before Moving to Microsoft Office 2007

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Set your sights high because Microsoft Office 2007 helps you work more efficiently and more effectively than ever before. Office offers an integrated set of tools that includes a word processor, a spreadsheet, a presentation program, a note-taking application, a contact management system, and more. Microsoft made long strides toward producing an Office product that is both a pleasure to use and as simple as possible. Its simplicity lacks nothing in power; however, because Microsoft Office is the hands-down most powerful, best integrated, and most widely used set of applications in use today.

Given that Office has such a large, installed base, the best place to start is with a quick overview of its most important new features. Two features obviously stand out and those are the best place to begin your Office 2007 survey. After you have this bird's-eye view, you'll be ready to tackle all the tasks that make Office 2007 do the work you need done, as quickly and efficiently as possible.

A Stunning New Interface

Microsoft completely redesigned Office 2007's interface. You'll interact with the Office programs like never before. Although each version of Office has brought about some user interface changes, Office 2007 takes those changes to an extreme.


Extra Info

How extreme are the user interface changes in Microsoft Office 2007? You can perform every task without selecting from one menu or using one toolbar button! If you've used Office in the past, that statement is going to sound far too bold to be accurate. Yet it's true.

Although Microsoft changed, tweaked, and updated hundreds of Office's elements, the most significant and most obvious changes to users of previous editions will be these two:

The Office ribbon

The Live Preview
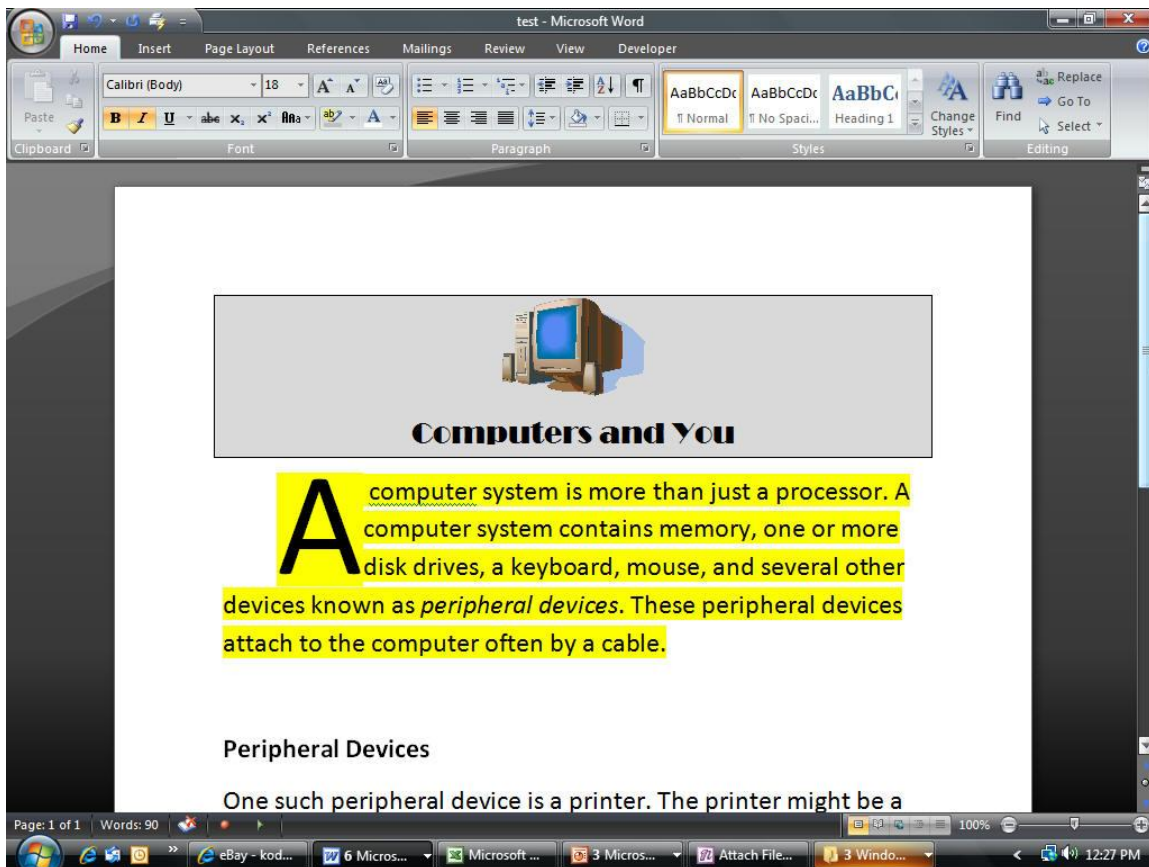
As you can see here, the new Office ribbon that sits atop most Office 2007 screens is your new command center to control any and all features you need to control while using Office.
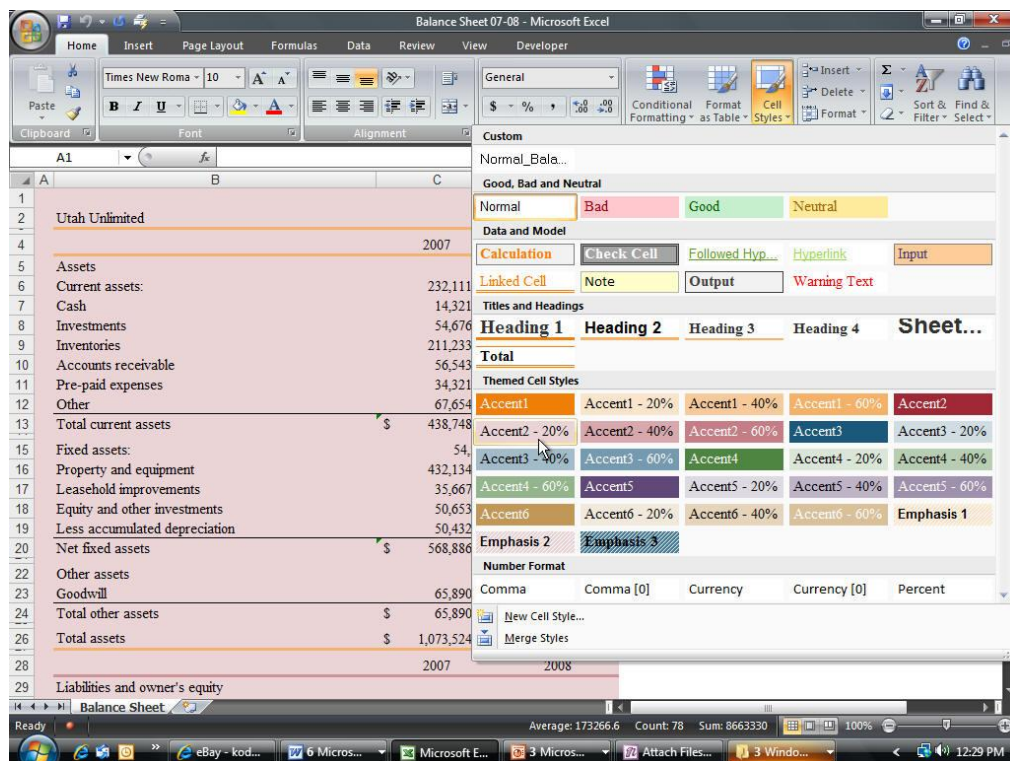
Office 2007's Live Preview feature means that you can see dramatic format changes before you actually apply those changes to your documents.

Office 2007 certainly provides far more new features than the ribbon and Live Preview, but those two features are the most visual and the most obvious differences over all the previous versions of Office. It's worth a little time to preview both features here at the beginning of your Office 2007 experience. In a way, the ribbon and the Live Preview features are the most important to understand because everything else you do depends on your understanding them.

## The Ribbon Provides What You Need When You Need It

Sure, the toolbars are gone, but the ribbon at first appears little more than a wider toolbar with buttons. It is in a way, but the ribbon is more than just a toolbar. When you work in an Office 2007 application, the ribbon displays tools you need at the time. For example, when you're creating an Excel worksheet, Excel's **Home** ribbon appears. The

Home ribbon performs common commands such as formatting, cutting, copying, pasting, sorting, finding, replacing, and other common commands that you often use when working on a worksheet.

Extra Info

Neither Outlook 2007 nor OneNote 2007 uses a ribbon. The traditional menus and toolbars appear atop those programs as before.

If you insert a chart into a worksheet, the Excel ribbon immediately changes to the **Chart Tools Design** ribbon. Excel understands that when you insert or select a chart, you're not going to be entering a formula or format text inside a cell. Instead, when a chart is newly placed or when you select a chart, you're indicating that you want to do something to that chart. The **Chart Tools Design** ribbon appears and provides chart-formatting and editing tools you need for working with a chart.
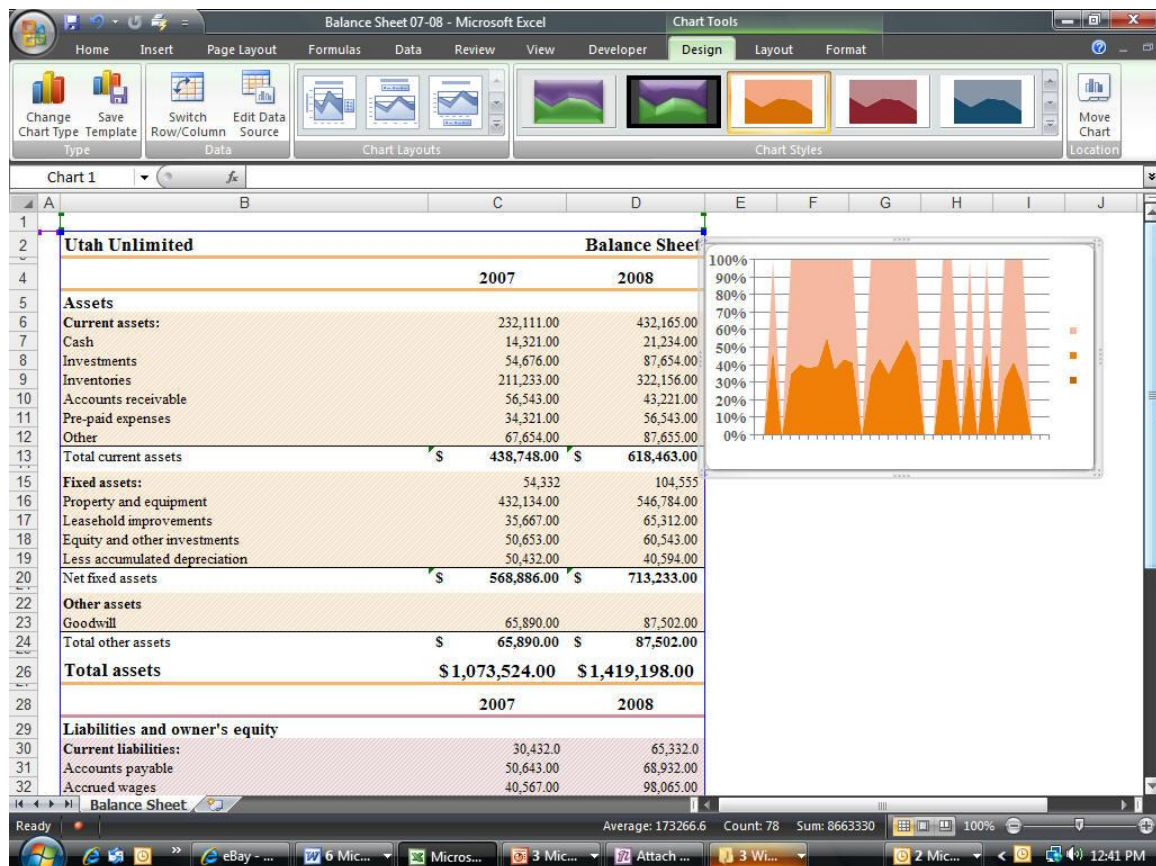
When you're working with a chart, Excel's ribbon changes to provide charting tools you might need.

The moment you stop working on the chart and click inside a cell, Excel's ribbon changes back to the **Home** ribbon, where the most common cell-editing buttons reside. Before Office 2007, you would have to select from a menu to locate chart-editing commands. No more searching; the commands appear when you need them and go away when you don't.

The Difficulty of Switching to the Ribbon

Be warned: The interface change, especially due to the ribbon, takes some time to get used to if you've used Office in the past. When you first upgrade to Office 2007, you will find yourself wanting to do something, such as use the AutoText feature, and without the familiar menus to guide you, it can be a tad difficult to locate the ribbon button that helps you accomplish what you want to do.

Extra Info

In defense of the ribbon, traditional Office menus were not always intuitive. Using the **Language** menu to get to hyphenation and thesaurus tools wasn't obvious. The ribbon will be foreign and you will miss the menus at first; but you should grow accustomed to the ribbon far faster than you mastered the menu selections that previous Office versions offered.

You have an advantage over most new Office 2007 users in that you have this text in your hands. The task-based, step-by-step approach is the number-one way to transition to your new Office interface. By the time you've completed a handful of tasks, you'll understand the ribbon, and you will probably appreciate it more than you currently think is possible. That seems to be the usual progression others find, according to publications and *blogs* related to Office 2007.

Learn This New Term

Blogs–Short for *web log*, a collection of notes by one or more website collaborators, typically arranged in order of postings with the most recent posting at the top and most visual place. Blogs are often used for spreading ideas, dialoging with others of similar interests, and journalizing personal and public events.

One Menu and Toolbar Are Still There

Office 2007 does offer one universal menu and a universal toolbar that Word, Excel, and PowerPoint give you access to:
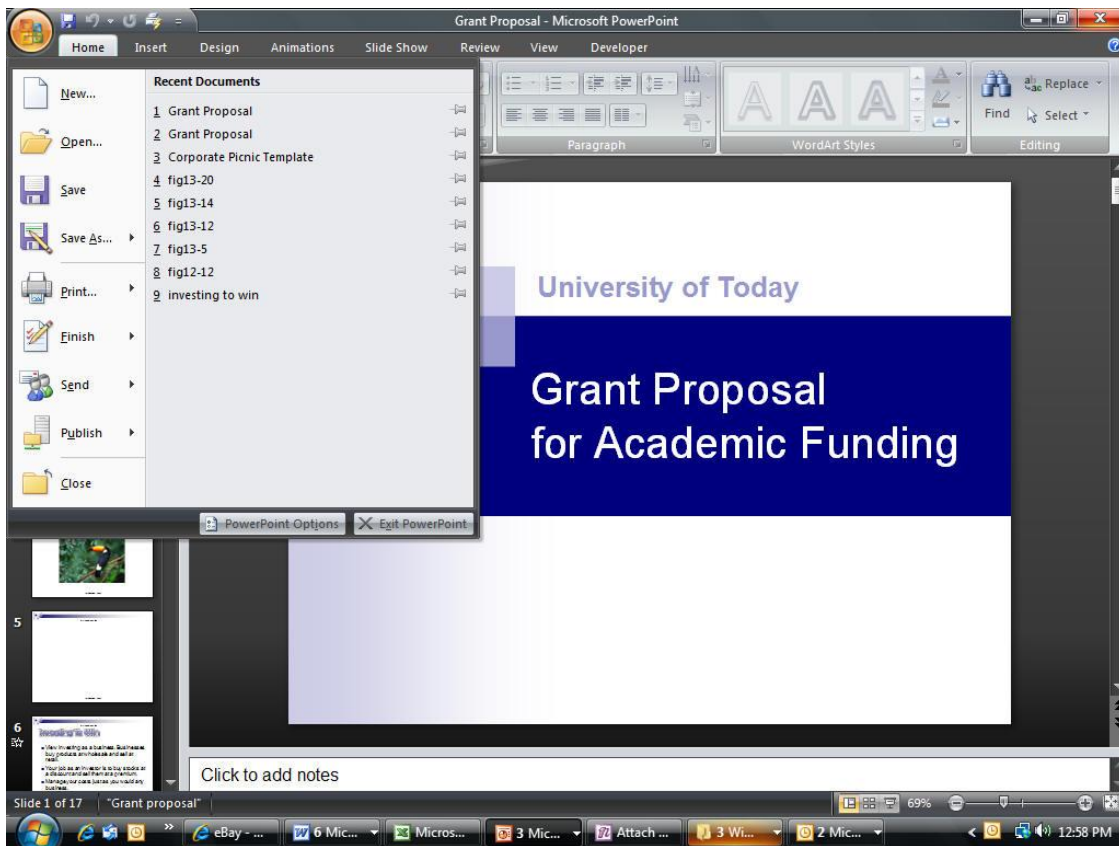
The **Quick Access** toolbar

The **Office** menu

The **Quick Access** toolbar is a small four-button toolbar that sits at the very top of your Word, Excel, and PowerPoint screens. The buttons enable you to do the following:

Save your document

Undo a command

Repeat your most recent edit or command

Print your document

The Quick Access toolbar and the Office menu are always available in Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

The **Office** menu appears when you click the **Office** button in the upper-left corner of your application. You'll find commands that formerly resided on the traditional **File** menu in these applications, namely, New, Open, Save, Save As, Print, Send, and Close.

In addition to those commands, two new commands, **Finish** and **Publish**, appear on the **Office** menu. **Finish** enables you to apply protective and security elements to your document in case you want to save the document as a read-only file so that others can read but not change any data. The **Publish** command prepares your document for distribution to a wide audience such as you might do if you work in a group setting and need to distribute your document to others in the group.

It's unknown why Microsoft didn't put these file-related commands on the ribbon. Perhaps these commands would have required their own ribbon, a **File** ribbon, and the Office 2007 software engineers thought another ribbon would clutter the screen more than necessary. Whatever the reason, keep in mind that the **Office** menu and the **Quick Access** toolbar are there when you need them.

Live Preview–See Format Changes Before You Make Them

Certainly the most visually stunning change to Office 2007 is the Live Preview mode. Throughout much of the Office applications, when you select text, click to select a chart or graph, or want to adjust a presentation's title, you can see what any format change to the selected item will look like before you actually apply the format change.
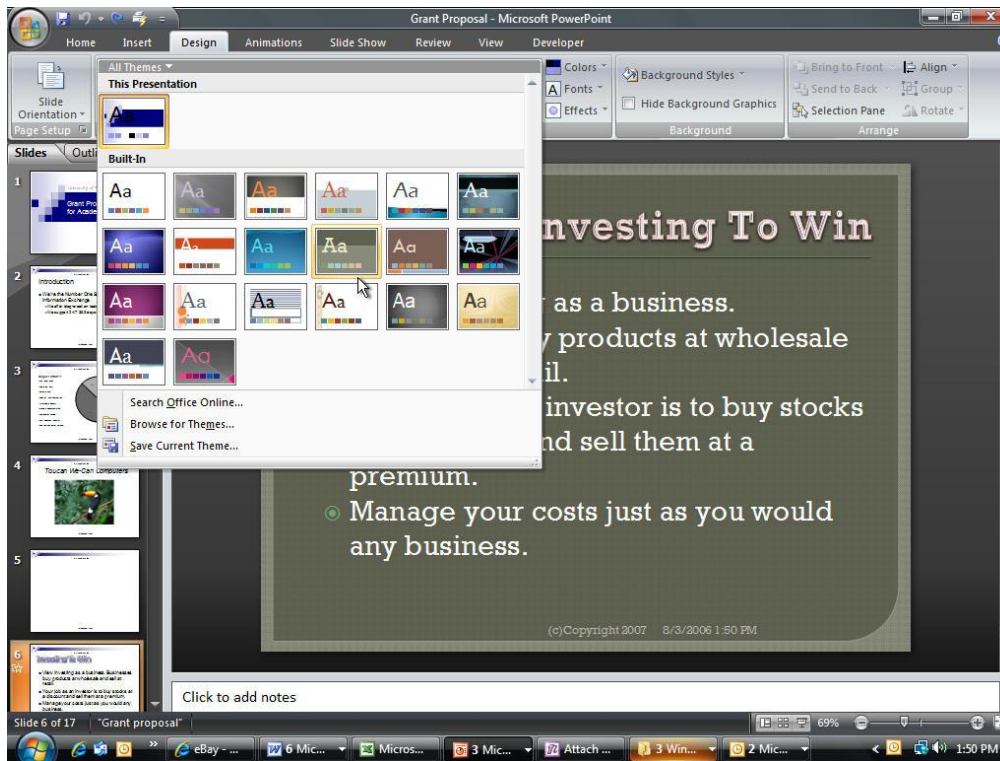
Point to any design and PowerPoint temporarily changes the slide to that design.

Suppose that you create a presentation and right before you give it you begin to feel that the presentation might be too informal for the audience. You expected a more casual audience and in came the suits. You can quickly modify the design of your entire presentation, and you could do the same with previous versions of PowerPoint. The advantage with PowerPoint 2007 is that you don't have to apply each format, one at a time, to see what that format actually looks like.

Just open the presentation, click the **Design** ribbon, and move your mouse over the various themes that appear in the **Themes** group. If you click the down arrow to the right of the **Themes** group, PowerPoint opens a larger selection of themes from which you can choose. Each theme adds a different flair to your entire presentation. As you point to each of the available themes, the slide that appears under the theme selection changes to show what that theme will look like on that slide. Point to a different theme and the slide changes to reflect it.

Extra Info
Themes are a new formatting element to Office 2007.

The Live Preview changes don't have to be dramatic to be effective. If you simply select text and begin to select a new font size, Office 2007's Live Preview mode changes

your selected text to the font sizes you choose as you scroll through them. By doing so, you can see how the font-size change will affect the rest of the text and formatting on your page. As you scroll through each number, the Live Preview changes the text to that number's font size. Stop where it looks best and click; your text remains at its new font size.

Previously, you would have to apply a format change, view the change, then undo the change, and go back to the menus to apply a different format. Now you can run through all the formatting selections quickly in one sweep, watching as they're applied to decide which is best for you at the time.

What Else Is New?

Now that you've read through an introduction to the newest Office 2007 features, it might help you get the big picture to learn what is new with Office 2007. Not everyone has yet to upgrade, and perhaps knowing what's in store would help your decision. The ribbon and the Live Preview features are certainly the most obvious new features, but they are not alone in what distinguishes Office 2007 from older versions.

When the Microsoft people set out to improve Office, they wanted users to get more work done faster and with less effort. Although that by itself might be a lofty goal, it's been the goal of every Office since 1.0. What makes Office 2007 so unusual in that respect is that the complete redesign–such as replacing the toolbars and menus with the ribbon–is more complete and richer than that of any Office program that has come before.

The big advantage to the improved user interface is that brand-new users should be able to begin using Office more quickly. No more wading through menus because what you need to be able to do should be on the ribbon at the top of the screen.

Office 2007 is certainly more graphical. Anyone who has used Excel's graphs and charts, for example, will see dramatic improvements in Excel 2007's graphing capabilities including the following:

New 3-D effects

Shadows

Reflection

Glows

Surface texture
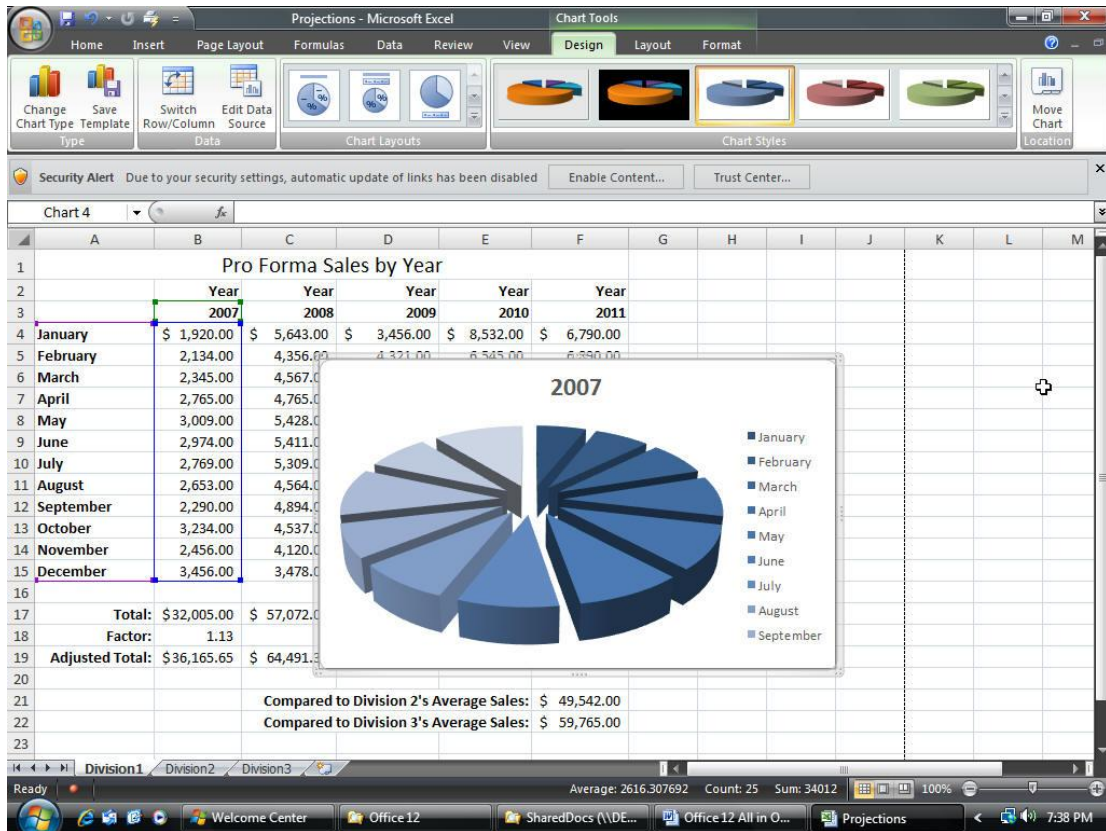
Quickly display and change your Excel 2007 graphs.

Outlook includes a new **To-Do Bar** that you can quickly show or hide to list current dates, appointments, and tasks that are the most pressing. Previous users will know that the **Outlook Today** screen did all this also, but you had to leave your email window to see your **Outlook Today** screen. Now with one mouse click you can view your **To-Do Bar** and see what tasks are left to check off.
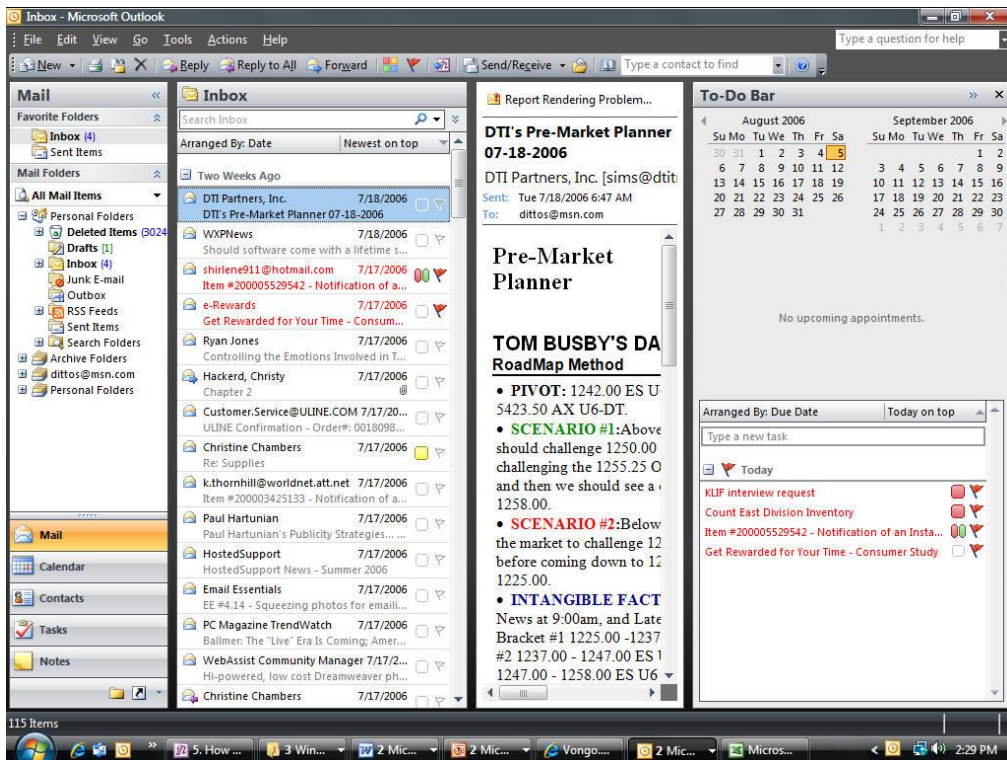
Outlook 2007 put the Outlook Today feature on your email screen so that you'll always keep tabs on what's left to do today.

Little things mean a lot in Office 2007. If you've ever tried to search for information in Outlook previously, you knew to take a long lunch break before expecting any results. Outlook 2007's search is almost instant, and Outlook begins searching the moment you start typing what you want to look for.

Extra Info

Unlike previous versions of Office, Outlook indexes your data as you work but does so unobtrusively in the background without hampering your system resources as before.

Before Office 2007, Office users would have to obtain a program to read RSS feeds from their favorite websites. Outlook 2007 can collect your RSS feeds and store them in your Inbox, where you can read them at your leisure. Outlook looks to be your central repository of data that crosses your path, so the addition of RSS feeds makes sense.

Office Works Under the Hood Too

In addition to the user interface changes and the new features you'll enjoy, Microsoft designed Office 2007 to work better and do more internally. You'll notice the vast

improvement in search speed as mentioned in the preceding section. In addition to the faster searches, Office 2007's file format is based on the XML language. The new *Microsoft Office Open XML File Format* ensures that your Office documents are smaller than before and more compatible with other programs.

In spite of the new Office 2007 file formats, you won't have trouble reading or writing data for Office's earlier versions. If you or co-workers need to share Office data among users from Office 97 to Office 2007, you'll be able to. When you save documents in Office 2007, you choose whether you want to use the streamlined Office Open XML File Format (the default) or save to an earlier data version such as PowerPoint XP's. Office 2007 can read and write to those previous versions with ease.

If you work in a collaborative environment and share documents between several users, Office 2007 extends the ability to work across boundaries and share documents over a network, an intranet, or the Internet.

Wrapping Up Your Preview

You now are far better prepared to move to Office 2007 than before. While introductory articles you may have read told you about features, you are now truly prepared to *move* to Office 2007.

Once you master the ribbon, and as said earlier that's easy, Office 2007 begins to come into full focus by making all the tools you need *right now* available right now while hiding the extras you don't need. Surprisingly, this makes for a smoother Office experience. You'll get your work done faster and better.

It's time to dive into Office 2007... Welcome, the swim there is wonderful!