

Microsofties' side project seeks new Office ideas

August 12 2009, By JESSICA MINTZ , AP Technology Writer



(AP) -- Have a gripe about Office? A couple of guys at Microsoft Corp. want to hear it directly.

"Make Office Better" is an unofficial project launched by an Office product planner and a Windows software tester at [Microsoft](#).

Individuals submit ideas and weigh in on whether they like the ideas submitted by others. Topics that resonate most with the crowd should get the most "me, too" votes and rise to the top.

It's similar to the approach taken by the news aggregator site digg.com and the IdeaStorm product-suggestion site run by PC maker Dell Inc.

After a few weeks online, Make Office Better has racked up about 750 ideas, but only about 150 of them got 10 votes or more.

One particularly passionate user made at least eight separate submissions to "Ditch the Ribbon," referring to the new user interface introduced with Office 2007.

The leading suggestion, to change the way the Outlook e-mail program handles Web-page-style e-mails, was posted by one of the project's founders, Steve Zaske.

Many of the ideas are highly technical. Some reveal nostalgia for features in WordPerfect, which was overtaken as the top word processing program by [Microsoft Office](#) years ago. Others argue for more compatibility with OpenOffice, a free set of competing programs.

And some are just way out there, like one request to turn Microsoft Word into a way to self-publish and sell electronic books, with Microsoft taking a cut.

Microsoft isn't commenting on the site or promising to review any of the ideas, although Zaske and co-founder Luke Foust say they'll try to get the top suggestions onto the Office team's radar. And the software maker already has other ways of seeking input from Office users, some built right into the [software](#) itself.

But if Make Office Better catches on like Dell's IdeaStorm, Microsoft may want to bring this outside tool in-house. The Dell site has logged more than 12,000 ideas, with top ones garnering more than 100,000 votes. Dell says it has acted on more than 350 of them.

At least the Microsoft site has a sense of humor. In a graphic at the top of the home page, it puts "Clippy," the much-maligned, animated paper

clip that offered Word and Excel tips until Office 2007's launch, somewhere on the evolutionary timeline between apes and cave men.

On the Net:

<http://www.makeofficebetter.com>

<http://www.ideastorm.com>

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