

Microsoft sends Office into the Internet 'cloud'

October 19 2010



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Microsoft Office 365 joined SharePoint, Exchange, and Lync programs that can be "rented" as online services, sparing companies the expense and hassle of buying, installing and maintaining the software on their computers.

"We embraced the cloud because we actually believed it would change the way people work," said Office division president Kurt DelBene. "People can focus on their business while we and our partners take care of the technology."

Microsoft planned a mid-day launch of a website Office365.com where businesses tiny or huge could sign up to take part in a test, or beta, program.

A public version of the cloud service will be available worldwide next year, executives said.

Office 365 for small businesses or professionals can be set up in as few as 15 minutes and subscriptions cost six dollars per month per user.

Software packages tailored to the needs of large businesses will be available for monthly per-user subscriptions ranging from two dollars to 27 dollars.

"This is a wonderful growth opportunity for Microsoft," said Microsoft senior vice president Chris Capossela said while demonstrating Office 365 at a press event in San Francisco.

"Traditionally, Microsoft has only competed in the software space. With this, we are actually in a much larger pool of IT spend because we are in a place to run their network."

Microsoft began offering its popular [software](#) as "cloud" services a couple of years ago in the face of a trend championed by Internet titan [Google](#).

Providing Office as an online service will mean that Outlook exchange and document programs that have been fixtures on business networks will be accessible through smartphones, tablets, and other gadgets used by an increasingly mobile workforce.

"We are at a pivot point in the adoption of cloud services," DelBene said. "Customers are no longer asking whether to move to the cloud, but

when and how."

Companies in 40 countries use cloud services offered by Microsoft, according to DelBene.

"The cloud actually changes the rules of business for our customers," DelBene said. "A business now basically gets an elastic IT capacity. Small companies can have the capabilities of big corporations at low cost."

Features offered as cloud services by Microsoft include video conferencing, social networking, and voice mail sent to email inboxes.

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