

Microsoft revamps Office for tablets, Internet (Update 2)

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Kirk Koenigbauer, Corporate Vice President of Microsoft Office Division, speaks at a Microsoft event in San Francisco, Monday, July 16, 2012. Microsoft unveiled a new version of its widely used, lucrative suite of word processing, spreadsheet and email programs Monday, one designed specifically with tablet computers and Internet-based storage in mind. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

New versions of Microsoft's word processing, spreadsheet and email programs will sport touch-based controls and emphasize Internet storage to reflect an industry-wide shift away from the company's strengths in desktop and laptop computers.

The new offerings appear designed to help Microsoft retain an important source of revenue as more people access documents from mobile devices. The new Office suite also reflects the fact that people tend to work from multiple computers — perhaps a desktop in the office, a

laptop at home and a tablet computer on a train and a smartphone at the doctor's office.

Like an upcoming redesign of Microsoft's Windows operating system, the new Office will respond to touch as well as commands delivered on a computer keyboard or mouse.

The addition of touch-based controls will enable Office to extend its franchise into the rapidly growing tablet computer market. Apple dominates that market with the iPad, though Microsoft has plans to compete with its own tablet, called Surface.

The programs will store documents online through Microsoft's SkyDrive service by default, meaning users will have to change settings to store documents on their own computer. The programs will also remember settings, including where you last left off in a document, as you move locations.



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The Internet-based services approach is one Google has been promoting with its own suite of similar programs, threatening Microsoft's dominance.

"This is the most ambitious release of Office that we have ever done," CEO Steve Ballmer said Monday in unveiling the new Office in San Francisco.

A preview version of the new Office suite is being made available online at office.com/preview . Microsoft Corp. isn't saying when it will go on sale or what the price will be. Those details will come in the fall.

Microsoft will continue selling the package as standalone software that can be installed on computers, but the company expects the bulk of users will opt for an Internet-based version, which comes with automatic updates for a recurring subscription fee.

Other features in the new Office include:

— Inkling, which lets you use a stylus to write on a device's screen. Handwritten notes are converted automatically to text.

— Integration with Yammer, a social network for businesses, and with Skype, a video chat service. Microsoft agreed last month to buy Yammer for \$1.2 billion, while Microsoft spent \$8.5 billion to buy Skype last year.

— Bing Maps will be part of the new Outlook email program. If there's an address in an email, just tap on it to get directions.

— A "reading" mode on Word will make it easier to read word-processing documents on a tablet or e-reader. That mode will make the document look more like a book page. You can also embed video into

Word documents, or share a document directly on Facebook.

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