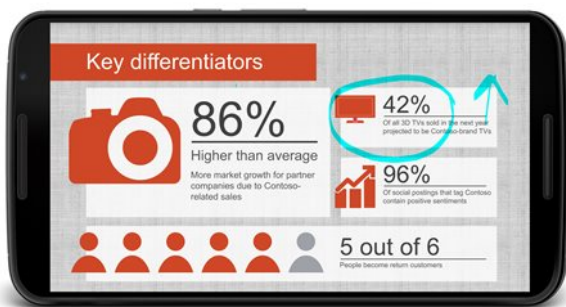


# Review: Microsoft Office, Foursquare mayors, Amazon Echo

25 June 2015, by The Associated Press



This product image provided by Microsoft shows the new PowerPoint app for Android devices. Android versions of Word, Excel and PowerPoint are now available in the Google store. (Microsoft via AP)

Android phone owners can now use an updated version of Microsoft's Office tools for writing, spreadsheets and slideshows.

The new Word, Excel and PowerPoint apps are designed to provide more functions on small touchscreens. Microsoft released them for Android phones this week in another move to make some of its most popular software tools available to people who don't use Microsoft's Windows operating system.

The company had released redesigned versions for Android tablets in January and for iPhones and iPads last year. But Android phone users had only a bare-bones version, except through a limited "preview" of the expanded offering. (Of course, Android device owners have also been able to use competing tools from Google and other app-makers.)

There are still no comparable apps for phones and tablets running Microsoft's own Windows system,

though that will change once Windows 10 gets released next month. As Android phones have had until now, Windows phones get only the bare-bones Office. Windows tablet owners have to use a version more suited for laptops and desktops with real keyboards.

The mobile apps are free, although Microsoft is offering more features to users with an Office 365 subscription, which starts at \$70 a year.

Microsoft says some phone makers including Samsung, Sony and LG will ship Android phones with Office already installed. The new apps will work on older phones running the KitKat version of Android from 2013 and Lollipop from last year, but nothing older than that.

— Brandon Bailey, AP Technology Writer

For a certain subset of people, life started to have meaning again this week, when the startup Foursquare announced that its location-sharing app Swarm is bringing back mayorships.

Come again? Foursquare, you see, was an app that allowed users to "check in" to bars, restaurants and other places. You became the "mayor" of a place if you checked in more than anyone else in a given period. There were fierce competitions for mayorships. While Foursquare's user base stayed small, many users were fiercely loyal.



This product image provided by Amazon shows the Amazon Echo speaker. The biggest feature in Amazon's Echo speaker is a voice-recognition system called Alexa that is designed to control Pandora, Amazon Music and Prime Music services as well as give information on news, weather and traffic. (Amazon via AP)

In 2014, with user growth stalling and competitors like Yelp eclipsing it, Foursquare split itself into two apps. Foursquare became the place for people to discover businesses and venues around them, while the social features migrated to a new app called Swarm. At Swarm, you can check in to places and share this information with your Swarm buddies.

The Swarm app also let users compete for mayorships, but only among their friends. This, Foursquare said, "just wasn't as much fun."

So in a blog post, Foursquare said it was "upping the ante and letting you compete for mayorships against everyone."

Let the battles begin.

Elsewhere in the world of social media:

— Facebook is now letting people sign up for its Messenger app even if they don't have a Facebook account. It's another way the world's biggest online social network is spreading its tentacles over your phone. This option is available in the U.S., Canada, Peru and Venezuela.

— Instagram is creeping on Twitter and Periscope territory. The photo-sharing app announced this week that it wants to let users "see the world as it happens." It's revamping its "Explore" page to help users discover events while they happen, from concerts to sports events to sunsets on the Santa Cruz boardwalk. It's also made it easier to search for people, places and tags—at the same time, if you'd like.

— Barbara Ortutay, AP Technology Writer

Amazon is expanding the availability of a wireless speaker that responds to voice commands.

The biggest feature in Amazon's Echo speaker is a voice-recognition system called Alexa that is designed to control Pandora, Amazon Music and Prime Music services as well as give information on news, weather and traffic. You can also re-order items in your order history using your default payment and shipping settings. The Echo can also sync with Belkin WeMo and Philips Hue products to control home light bulbs and other devices.

Amazon had been selling the Echo on an invite-only basis since it came out last November. Now, anyone can buy one. Echo will start shipping on July 14. The price was also cut to \$179, from \$199 (though Amazon has offered it for lower to members of its \$99-a-year Prime loyalty program).

Begun as a bookseller, Amazon has been selling many of its own products, including a video streaming device, e-book readers and tablets. It also has a streaming video service, grocery delivery and music streaming and has created original TV shows such as the critically acclaimed "Transparent" starring Jeffrey Tambor.

— Mae Anderson, AP Technology Writer

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