Crabby tackles Microsoft Office for Mac 2008

Print

Crabby Office Lady

Office isn't just for Windows-based computers. In fact, Office 2008 for Mac offers a powerful set of programs that are specifically designed with you Mac users in mind.

The infamous Apple TV commercial, the one that features two men — one representing a PC and the other a Mac — has become the stuff of pop culture. And why not? It's hip and it's clever (if a tad mean-spirited toward the PC): The PC guy looks like someone who spends his life in a cubicle while the Apple dude is all chill and looking like he could date Drew Barrymore ... The ads basically poke fun at some of the differences between the two types of computers (and unfairly, I'd say). However, while one point of this commercial is to point out the differences between these two types of computers, one thing remains unambiguously the same: They both use Microsoft Office. Period. There is no joshing about that fact — it's a given.

Judging by the e-mail messages and feedback I've gotten from my readers, it seems that many of you are loyal Mac fans. And while I'm not normally a Mac user, my very first computer was an Apple and so I know that it's a fine piece of machinery. So, for this week's column, I decided to write a little bit about Office for the Mac.

There are both similarities and differences between what Office for Windows offers and what Office for Mac offers. Let's take a look.

Office 2008 for Mac

Both Office for Windows and Office for Mac offer Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. While some features and tools are the same for both systems, things start to look a bit different when you get in there and start working. The layout (how things look) and the user interface (how you work in the program) are quite a bit different. And that's a good thing because people who use Macs want a certain look and people who use Windows want another look. (Think Sandra Bullock versus Catherine Deneuve, or perhaps Jackson Pollack versus Gustav Klimt — and I'm not saying which is which). Good thing Office can handle both.

Find it faster

For a few programs in Office 2007 for PC, we replaced the traditional menus and toolbars with the Microsoft Office Fluent user interface (also know as the Ribbon) so that you can find and use the features you need — and use — a lot easier. In Word, PowerPoint, and Excel 2008 for Mac, it's called the Elements Gallery, located below the toolbars. It provides quick access to some of the most-used features.

From the Elements Gallery, you can add SmartArt graphics, WordArt, charts, tables, and templates to your documents and presentations. In PowerPoint, you can apply slide layouts or slide themes from the Elements Gallery. In Excel, you can find preformatted ledger sheets in the Elements Gallery.

Save as PDF

Make it easier to share all your files by using the popular Portable Document Format (PDF). PDF ensures that your documents appear with the correct layout and fonts on any computer that can view PDF files. The PDF file format option is now available directly from the **Save As** dialog box on the **File** menu in Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. So, no more complaints from folks who can't open your documents, presentations, or spreadsheets.

Theme-aware color picker

You know how you would like to see how a color will look when applied to a particular theme ...*before* you actually apply it? By using the new theme-aware color picker on the Formatting Palette, you can quickly see how various theme colors appear when applied to a theme. In PowerPoint, you can create custom theme colors. You can then apply the custom theme colors to other Office documents.

There are many more Office-wide improvements in this version. Visit Mactopia (the home page for Office for the Mac) to read more about improved charting, the default flexible XML file format, Mail Merge Manager, and more.

Word 2008 for Mac

In Word, both systems offer great reference tools, powerful reviewing capabilities, and enhanced views, such as a navigation pane with a document map and thumbnail views so that you can better organize your thoughts.

One of my favorite new features in Word 2008 for Mac that we just don't have in Word 2007 for Windows is **Publishing layout view**. This new working environment in Word combines powerful desktop publishing tools and designer templates in one location. Use publishing layout view to quickly create professional-looking documents, such as brochures, catalogs, flyers, and newsletters. It's like having Publisher and Word ... all in the same program.

Interested in more? Take a trip to Mactopia to read about other new and enhanced features in Word 2008 for Mac such as ligatures in fonts, document elements, and publication themes.

Excel 2008 for Mac

Just like in Excel for Windows, Excel 2008 for Mac offers advanced charting tools, easy-to-set-up formulas, and a Page Layout view that allows you to review and manipulate on screen what will appear on paper. One of the differences is that Excel for Mac offers a bit more advanced charting features (which is no surprise since it's pretty well known that the Mac is used more widely for graphics-rich types of presentations and documents).

The new preformatted ledger sheets can work to help you create invoices, create a budget, and even balance your checkbook (that one I need). Each ledger sheet addresses a specific scenario. For example, if you open a portfolio ledger sheet, the sheet contains all of the formulas and columns appropriate for tracking and managing investment portfolios (assuming that you can afford investments because you have balanced your checkbook, of course).

Use these preformatted Excel sheets to balance your check book, track an investment portfolio, create an expense report, and perform other common tasks. Each ledger sheet addresses a specific scenario. For example, if you open an invoice ledger sheet, the sheet contains all of the formulas and columns appropriate for tracking and managing invoices.

Want to learn about improved charting features, the new Formula Builder (no more memorizing complex functions and their syntax!), and the new Formula AutoComplete? Mactopia is the place to see it all.

PowerPoint 2008 for Mac

When it comes to presentation software, we all know that PowerPoint is the industry leader. (I mean, when you see cartoons about it in The New Yorker magazine, you know it's at the top.)

Both PowerPoint for Mac and PowerPoint for Windows let you customize your presentations in a variety of ways. You can use predefined templates, create your own presentation, use animations, and add graphics and video to your slides. But here is something PowerPoint for Windows can't do: Send slide shows to a video iPod.

Say you've created the most amazing presentation of your trip to Scotland or perhaps Dollywood (where my editor vacations) and you want to share it with someone. Say this someone doesn't have PowerPoint. Or, imagine yourself being able to show this slide show to anyone and everyone (whether they want to see it or not). All you need to do is send it from your Mac to iPhoto, and then after the presentation is in iPhoto, you can sync the slides with a video iPod. PowerPoint creates a picture for each slide in your presentation, and then saves the pictures as an album in your iPhoto Library. How cool is that?

And let's not forget about slide themes, a coordinated set of fonts, colors, and visual effects that give your presentation a unified design. There are dozens of professionally designed themes that you can preview and apply directly from the Slide Themes tab in the Elements Gallery.

PowerPoint 2008 for Mac comes with several that you can use as is or modify, and you can also import themes from other Office files. Mactopia has some great demos and training courses on just about anything you want to do in PowerPoint 2008 for Mac.

Outlook versus Entourage

While the mail program in Office for Windows is Outlook, it's called Entourage for Mac users. Both Outlook and Entourage help you handle e-mail messages, contacts, schedules, notes, documents, tasks, and more from one central location. Both also work with Microsoft Exchange Server and have that cool three-column view: folder list, messages (that you can thread by date, conversation, flags, whatever), and preview pane.

However, one interesting feature I found in Entourage 2008 for Mac is called the My Day feature. It basically goes like this:

Say you're in a hurry and you just need to access your calender and To Do List. With the My Day feature you can do it from your desktop without having to open Entourage.

A few other items to whet your appetite:

- Add, rearrange, or remove toolbar buttons so that you can customize your workspace just how you like it.
- Filter out unwanted messages better than ever with enhanced Junk E-mail Protection.
- Use the power of Spotlight to find any information that you have in Entourage, even message attachments.

Head on over to Mactopia for other tasty tidbits.

And there you have it: A few things about Office 20087 for Mac that have got me interested in the Mac all over again. Do you have a Mac? How about you send me a tip about using Office 2008 and I'll print it in a later column. Write to me at crabby@microsoft.com. And hey, the PC guy on the commercials may be a bit hapless, but at least he's humble — as opposed to smug and sarcastic. But that's just my opinion. You choose for yourself.

"If we had less statesmanship we could get along with fewer battleships." — Mark Twain

About the author

Annik Stahl, the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Was this information helpful?** tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.