

Crabby's (and Deep Throat's) top 5 features of Project 2007

Applies to: Microsoft Office Access 2007, Project 2007, Access 2003

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Crabby Office Lady

We all know (or should know) that Project is the must-have program for anyone trying to manage a, well, project. And while the previous versions have done a good job of helping you do this, Office Project 2007 has some new features that will have you wondering how you got along without them in the first place.

Some Office programs — just as some people — have names that truly fit who and what they are. For example, Word is a program that helps you make use of words; Visio (one letter short of "vision") is all about being able to view complicated scenarios; and Project is about managing, well, projects. And "Crabby..." (well, you get the point).

You may have noticed that I don't often write about Project. I figure that if I have a project here at work that needs that super-duper organization that Project users want, I'll go find a project manager. It's not because I don't like it, have anything against it, or have failed to notice how friggin' useful and efficient it is. No — not at all. Basically, Office Project is project management software that acts like a right-hand man (or woman, of course) for developing plans, assigning tasks to different resources (also known as PEOPLE), tracking the progress of everything, managing the budget for the project, and analyzing the workload. I spoke with several project managers around here about it, and when I asked them what they would use if they didn't have access to Project, I got a lot of blank stares (and even a few tears, as if I had evil plans to uninstall Project from their computers).

Never fear, Project lovers, a good thing has just gotten better. There are some new features in Office Project 2007 that even some of you die-hard Project users will be more than thrilled about. Perhaps you're still plugging along in Project 2002 or Project 1936. I have no idea. So, here in no apparent order, are five of the new features Office Project 2007 has to offer you.

Project? What's Project? Will there be a test on this?

Some of you may have never heard of Project. It's not the sort of Office program that everyone uses like, say, Outlook or Word. However, it's a very useful product. For example:

- You're a project manager and you have a big project coming up, such as designing a new feature for an upcoming new release of a new program. You need to get help from the people on your team, make sure that the right people are assigned to the right tasks, make sure that everyone is on track with how things are getting done, and also make sure that you're staying on budget. Trying to do this with Outlook tasks or even OneNote just doesn't make sense.

What's new

Because I don't use Project on a day-to-day basis, I managed to develop a relationship with someone who does — someone who writes about the program. In fact, this person is my "Deep Throat," if you will. She (oops — I mean he or she) has clued me into what you have been asking for and how the Project team was able to provide it for you. So sit back, and listen up; I'm only going over this once. After you read this column, it will self-destruct. (OK, not really; I just had that old Mission Impossible thing on my mind.)

Multi-Level Undo

Changes to a project are always necessary (no one's perfect — except in her imagination), so from what I understand, Project users have been asking for a Multi-Level Undo feature for a looooong time. You know what they say about the squeaky wheel, you grease monkeys... OK, so, with Multi-Level Undo, you can now reverse the most recent series of changes to views, data, and options. But wait! There's more! You can also undo actions or sets of actions from macros or third-party applications. So now you, as the project manager, have the flexibility to try new options and scheduling assignments. Flexibility in a program is good. (Actually flexibility in anything is good: bodies, relationships, mortgage companies...)

Task Drivers pane

As you know, with Project you can manage and understand your project schedules by tracing the sources of issues, testing alternative scenarios, and seeing the effects of a change. Obviously, this helps you to better organize your projects and people. The new Task Drivers pane shows the constraints that drive a task's start time and helps you backtrack and analyze these constraints. This is big because in previous versions it wasn't clear how various factors played into scheduling. With this feature, customers can quickly see, for a specific task, what is driving the scheduling of that task. This makes it easier to know what might need to be adjusted to make the schedule work in the project manager's favor.

For example, if a certain resource is assigned to a whole slew of tasks, his or her availability may affect the scheduling of any one of those tasks, pushing the dates out until the resource is available. The project manager may look at the drivers for that task, and reassign the task to another resource (or add more resources, for example) to get it done earlier. In other words, as the project manager, you can track and evaluate effects of schedule and resource changes to overall project plans.

Change Highlighting

In Project, when you change one number, such as a date or a duration, it can impact numbers throughout the project plan if you have dependencies set up. With Change Highlights turned on, when a user changes a date, for example, the cells for the other dates that change as a result are shaded. Customers can quickly see what impact their changes have throughout the project. This is a big time-saver.

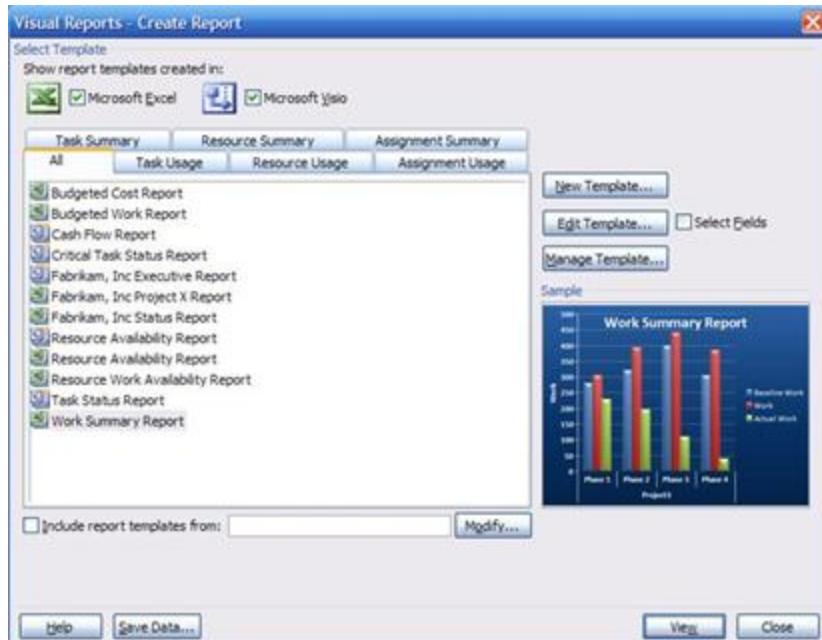
Cost resources

Everyone needs to get better control of their finances (boy, do I ever...). Cost resources in Project 2007 are cool (that's right — "cool") because they let you assign and track cost items — such as airfare or lodging — for a task. There *were* workarounds in previous versions, but now that there is actually a place for cost resources in Project 2007, you can specifically track when and how much was spent — on things like, um, legitimate business expenses — within a task's duration.

They're also unique because they won't change the project's schedule the same way a work resource or material resource does. Even better, availability doesn't matter with cost resources, so it won't impact any dates. Using Cost resources, you can more accurately monitor project financials and keep your project in sync with data in your accounting systems.

Visual Reports

I'll admit it: Reporting hasn't been a strong suit in previous versions, so you Project users should be excited to see the addition of Visual Reports. These reports export data to Office Visio and Office Excel in "slice-n-dice-able" formats that look impressive on paper and screen (or even on an infomercial — I just think that term "slice-n-dice-able" belongs on late-night TV). They're a whole lot more flexible than the previous reporting solution. You can create great-looking charts, graphs, and diagrams using your Project data.



So basically, with Visual Reports, filters and pivots give you a deeper understanding of the status of your project's resources, costs, and schedules. Again, a picture can tell a thousand words.

Final thoughts on Project 2007

And there you have it: My "Deep Throat's" idea of the top five new features in Project 2007. (And now that the column is nearly finished, I shall reveal my source: Sonia Atchison. Thanks, Sonia...)

For those of you who already use Project, you know that it's the leading project management tool if you want to better plan, manage, and communicate project information. If you're new to Project, I suggest you download a trial and take it for a spin. In the top right of this column is a box that will lead you to the direction for how to do that as well provide other Project 2007 resources.

"A bad habit never disappears miraculously; it's an undo-it-yourself project." — Abigail Van Buren

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 **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.