



Meet the real Crabby Office Lady

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Annik Stahl

I've written the **Crabby Office Lady** column just about every week since 2002. Here's the inside scoop on how the column got started, why it's been successful (I think), and who I am when not in "crabby mode."

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First off, I need to tell you that I am who I say I am. That picture is me. When I started publishing this column, I received lots of e-mail messages insisting that I couldn't possibly be who I was claiming to be: A cranky middle-aged woman with her heart set on dragging all of you — newbies, experts, and all those in between — into my world of productivity and workplace culture.

To clear up any preconceived notions you may have about me:

- I am not a man (at least last time I checked).
- I do not work for Marketing.
- I am not a group of writers.

I'm not entirely sure why so many of you couldn't possibly believe that one lone woman was writing a weekly column. Ever heard of Ann Landers? Miss Manners? Maureen Dowd? All of those ladies write — or wrote — a weekly column; it is possible, folks.

So, who am I if not a man, or a group of writers? And why a "crabby" office lady? And finally, if I don't work for Marketing, why would the world's leading software company with a reputation to uphold (you can stop your snickering now) let someone like Crabby address its customers in a way, well, in a way that you know I do? That's what we're here to find out.

Will the real Crabby please stand up?

My name is Annik Stahl. (That's "ah-NEEK." Not "ANN-ick" and not "uh-NICK." Annik. Like "unique" but spelled without all the fancy letters.) No, my parents weren't hippies; my mother is from France and so is my name. (It was brutal to have this name as a kid ... but I grew into it.)

I'm a real, live person (yes, of the female persuasion), who comes to work every day just like you; who has a family, just like you; who has good days and bad days (and good and bad hair days), just like you.

Unlike you, however, I not only have the opportunity to try and help people make the most of their time while using Office, but I also get to do it in a more, shall we say, *provocative* way than Microsoft's customers may be used to. Indeed, I just can't help myself. Is it because I'm always crabby? No. Is it because I'm sometimes crabby? Well, I am sometimes crabby, but that's not why either. Simply put, it's because I like it; it suits my writing style and my desire to actually help.

While I don't please all of our customers all of the time, I have assisted a good many of them part of the time, made some of them laugh another part of the time, and shocked or angered more than one at a time. So, I figure I have all bases covered. Even the angry ones are paying attention ...

I don't believe that being helpful and being humorous (or beautiful and fashionable, for that matter) are mutually exclusive. I also don't believe that you can — or even should — separate your work-self from your home-self. Donning circulation-constricting garments like pantyhose and ties (while those are rare here in Redmond, I know they exist) doesn't — or at least shouldn't — stop the blood flow to your funny bone (if it does, size up).

What I'm trying to say is: If you enjoy editorials and the occasional rogue insight along with your front page headlines, then the Crabby Office Lady is your gal. If it's all business today and you just want straight news without the sharp observations and clever asides, we've got help topics and other types of Office Online content that will take care of you. Far be it from me to force-feed you.

How the column got started

Let's begin at the beguine. (You remember the beguine, don't you? I told you what that word meant in [Demystify a few computer terms and get on with your life](#)). See, way back in 2001, I was working with a group of writers and editors here on the Microsoft Office team. We wrote help and created templates for good old **Office Tools on the Web**, the previous Office Web site, which retired in 2003 and is now living a comfortable life in Palm Desert.

There were help topics and templates on the old site, but that was about it. No training courses, no demos, no quizzes, and certainly no columnists. We felt we could do more. Also, we believed that our customers were not making full use of the Office programs and therefore were not achieving their potential either. That made us glum, and that's where I came in.

I decided to create the character of the Crabby Office Lady. I imagined her as a secretary from a bygone era. Her desk is littered with lipstick-marked foam cups of coffee, she's the one who keeps the supply of sticky notes, and only she knows just where the bodies are buried (so to speak). This is the lady no office can do without. While mumbling keyboard shortcuts under her breath, she can instruct you how to transpose a row of text into a column of text (Hint: It has something to do with the **Paste Special** dialog box). She's got a hard edge with a soft heart; she's a swivel chair guru — the resident Office expert. You understand, I admire her. And so no, I don't think that the character of Crabby is offensive to women, to persons of a certain age, or crabs.

She spoke to me. I spoke to you. And so, the column took off. Most people actually liked the fresh approach to offering help. Go figure.

Thank you

Since I'm coming clean here, let me really scrub: I am *not* an expert in all things Office. <Gasp!> No; in fact, you can often find me trolling the hallways mining information from the real experts such as fellow writers, my editor, program managers, testers, developers, and our smarty-pants young interns (this can be rather embarrassing but often fruitful). I also can be spotted visiting the Office Communities, scouring various reference books (Encyclopedia Crabbia?), and even searching our very own Office Online Web site to find answers to my (and your) burning questions. And so I thank everyone who has my back.

Especially, of course, I want to thank you, my loyal readers, who've inspired me to create better columns. Even if some of that "inspiration" has been a bit painful.

Favorite feedback

I've received some of the most hilarious, sweet, helpful, and downright mean feedback you can imagine. Here are a few actual comments from my customers:

- **The good** "Dear Crabby Office Lady, I like your style. In order to teach, you must first get their attention. You do grab attention and deliver the message. Thank you for making life a little more interesting and fun. There's nothing better than good information with an attitude."

NOTE Thanks, Mom.

- **The bad** "I am offended by Crabby Office Lady. Where is 'Sexist, Beat You Down Office Executive Man?' Oh, he must be the person who suggested the column, so he is getting all the credit from any success you may think you have from 'Crabby Office Lady.'"

NOTE Actually, "Sexist, Beat You Down Office Executive Man" hasn't worked here for years. But I'm enjoying his corner office.

- **The ugly** "More crabbiness. I feel misled."

NOTE I feel misled. Send me better feedback. Here's how:



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.

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