



**T**he year was 1990. The Hubble Space Telescope was launched, and the first McDonalds opens in Russia. The Internet was just getting started, and personal computers were changing the world. Microsoft Office was launched, as a revolutionary package of productivity software, giving consumers Word, Excel, and PowerPoint together for only \$600... that is \$1,243 in today's dollars.

Now 30 years later, we've enjoyed an explosion of software tools that go far beyond what MS Office Suite originally offered. There are many options to choose from cloud computing to data storage to collaborative editing, and versions built for mobile, PC, Mac, and packages for Home, Personal, Student, Business or Government. How do you know what you really need? Here are a few popular options and explanations of features that water systems or small cities can take into consideration when making a choice.

#### Where are you using this?

In the past, software was purchased from a real store. You opened a box, put a disk in your computer, and installed the solution. Soon, however, the Internet made it possible to download installations, and eliminated the need for hard disks. Extending this idea, a very popular business model for companies to offer software as of late is based on subscribing to a service to access the software. Some subscriptions require you to connect to their servers to use their product, called cloud computing, while others allow a hybrid of offline and online solutions.

**Office 365 is Microsoft's version of the subscription based model that**

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**has been around since 2011.** Why 365? Microsoft wants you to see how they provide support for your productivity every day of the year. Anytime you see the 365

designation, you know you are not getting the application as a one-time, standalone purchase. However, the 365 subscription still gives flexibility to allow you to choose the number of devices and which particular applications you will enjoy. The important difference is that you will have to pay monthly or annually for continued access.

Fortunately, the 365 editions combine both online and offline features, so you do not have to continually be connected to the Internet in order to use the software. In addition, this version offers other features that a standalone product cannot, such as continual updates, new features added as they are released. The data storage options allow you to save documents on Microsoft servers. This is very helpful if, for example, you work on documents both at home or the office, or if you travel quite a bit and use mobile devices to access the applications. It is also useful for data backups offsite, since documents are automatically backed up and secured on Microsoft servers.

However, some users prefer not to

have documents stored in the cloud. Although they are now addressing concerns, in 2018 Microsoft was found to be non-compliant with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulations which guide security and privacy of user data. There were no security breaches, but Microsoft was collecting data for diagnostics without user consent. In addition, some users prefer not to have to connect to the Internet for updates or certain features as a matter of convenience or annoyance. Office 365 pushes notifications or errors regarding offline use, and it can sometimes be confusing if your offline and online files are not synced. In addition, having more control over your version allows you to stay on older operating systems or not have to update continually to chase compatibility issues.

In determining what is best for your needs, ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ Do you have a consistent internet connection when you use the software?
- ◆ Do you need external data backups?
- ◆ How often do you upgrade your software?
- ◆ How much data storage space do you have versus what you need?
- ◆ Do you work on the same documents in different locations?

Answering these will help you determine if you want your Office "in the cloud" or "on your desk."

### Who will be using the software?

Perhaps an easier question is, who will be using this software? Microsoft offers Home, Personal, Student, Business, Government or Enterprise solutions based on the number of users or devices you need to use the license, and if those users need to work together. You should look at cost to determine which version you need, since the price difference between Personal and Home usually provides even one user greater flexibility to use across

several devices for a nominal increase in price.

Bundles labeled "Personal" provide access for one person only. Fortunately, Microsoft understands how one person can use several devices, so they allow for this in their licensing. "Home" licenses allow a family, or up to six people total, with their devices. Across the board, pricing is more economical with the Home license, so even if you only need it for two people, it's worth going with Home instead of two Personal licenses.

The "Student" license requires the individual to prove their educational status in order to get a good discount on a one-time purchase. However, if

you're a student or teacher, the online version of Microsoft Office is free, and they throw in 1 TB of space for data storage.

"Business" licenses are really only worth the price if used as a 365 version. A one-time purchase of

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Office for Business at \$250 only adds OneNote to the Classic apps, and is only valid for one device. However, the 365 version paid as a per-user annual subscription includes extended applications to support collaboration between teams. You can still choose a smaller “Essentials” online package at \$5 a month per user, or add desktop versions, Teams, Bookings and mileage tracking to the “Premium” package at \$20 a month per user.

Only larger corporations or businesses with many employees would find the “Enterprise” level of licensing worth the cost. However, if you need even greater features like Business class emails, online meetings for large groups, advanced security, file storage/sharing, or more, you could go to the trouble of qualifying for a “Government” level of licensing. Their definition for eligibility includes “city, municipality, town, township, special purpose district.” Their solutions are available as the 365 online version, and pricing is per user per month at a negotiated rate with a minimum required number of users. See this link for more:

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/government/compare-office-365-government-plans>

In determining what is best for your needs, ask yourself these questions: How many people need to use this? Do we need to collaborate and share work? Do we need extended applications? Answering these will help you narrow down the solutions you can choose.

### Why will you be using it?

Let’s face it. Most people haven’t even used the Classic three solutions to their full potential: Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. And if you’re clever, you might be able to get Excel to do almost anything. Almost.

For those other needs, Microsoft continues to develop and release more applications to get your business. While in most cases it makes sense to only purchase what you need, the way MS prices their software grouped in

packages of applications makes it advantageous for you to take a chance and gain access to more applications. Sometimes you don’t know what you need until you see a solution that fits. If that’s the case, you might balance your choice with a package that includes features you may not know if you will use, but are included anyway.

First think of all the activities you do and what you need to accomplish. Then choose the individual applications you know you must have. Find packages that provide those key programs, then compare pricing based on what additional products or services are available that include those.

Only a few products are available as offline only: Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote. But several are available downloaded to your desktop, needing an internet connection to work properly: OneDrive, SharePoint, Teams. However, the Office 365 product list is large and ever-growing: Bookings, Exchange, MileIQ, PowerBI, Project, Skype, Sway, Whiteboard, Yammer, just to name a few.

Here are a few of the products that small cities and water districts might find useful:

**Choosing just the right combination of products and services leads to the satisfaction of money well spent.**

Teams – collaborating for document sharing and editing and managing shared tasks.

Skype – a chat and online meeting program for small groups, supporting both internal and external users.

OneDrive – Online storage and backup that syncs to your computer. A

free version offers 5MB of space, but an Office 365 Home or Personal subscription includes 1 TB of storage. This is an obvious example of how packaging applications together by choosing a license can save you money and give you more features rather than piece-meal purchasing each application.

Outlook- -an email client and calendaring program that has capability to connect to other Microsoft offerings. For example, you could schedule a Skype meeting in your calendar and email invitations.

MileIQ- accurate mileage tracking and reporting for desktop and mobile that tracks in the background as you drive.

Access- database creator/customizer that goes beyond Excel’s two-dimensional capabilities.

In determining what is best for your needs, ask yourself these questions: What do I really need to get done? Where am I spending a lot of time doing manual repetitive tasks? Is there a solution I’ve not heard about that will make this easier? Answering these will help you determine how many applications you want to package together.

Choosing just the right combination of products and services leads to the satisfaction of money well spent. It also avoids confusing about notifications or messaging or lack of syncing that hurts productivity. We might find it a bit ironic that Microsoft puts out so many solutions to make our jobs easier, but the job of choosing that solution or package or license is much harder. Hopefully breaking down the process by asking Where, Who and Why, you will better navigate the sea of choices.

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