

Office XP Professional 2002

Product review by Rob Campion

Product Information:

Office XP Professional 2002 is a product of the **Microsoft Corporation**. Main offices are in Redmond Washington, U.S.A. This is an office suite consisting of six integrated applications. Although primarily intended for office professionals, it also has useful home use application. The full version of XP retails for around \$579.00, although substantial savings could be realized via online Internet ordering.

System Requirements-Minimum:

Win 98,NT with the service pack, Win2000, Win ME.
Pentium 133
32 megs of Ram
245 Megs of HDD space
CD Rom Drive
Mouse
Super VGA Monitor
16 bit sound card for voice recognition

Installation:

All running applications were terminated, and install was initialized. I installed on a pentium 500 with 192 Megs of Ram. The Operating System was a candidate for Release Ver 2 of Win XP Professional. A previous version of word was found and promptly uninstalled. The Install was smooth! No archaic messages, or Blue Screens of Death. Below is a brief outline of each module in the suite.

1. Microsoft Office XP Professional – Word:

One of the major changes to the interface is the task pane. You can see your recent documents, options for creating new documents, choosing existing documents and creating documents from templates all available in the new task pane. From the task pane you can access many other options. The Microsoft Word templates and wizards are of great assist in creating documents. There are a larger variety of templates to choose from Microsoft, or various places on the web. Although not a new feature, using Microsoft Word to create web pages is easy. You simply save the file as a web page instead of a Word document. You can also save existing Word documents as web pages. You can change the way your documents are displayed in Microsoft Word. The options are normal; web layout, print layout, outlines and prints preview. In normal view documents are shown in the general-purpose format i.e., No margins, headers or footers are shown. In layout mode text is shown without page breaks and background for images is shown. In print layout mode, text and graphics is shown, as it will appear on the printed page.

Print preview is an image of what your entire printed page will look like. Microsoft Word includes an AutoFormat option. When you use the AutoFormat option it applies consistent formatting to the text in the document. Using the voice recognition tool in Microsoft Word, you can get your work done quickly and easily. There are many new features in this version of Word.

2. Microsoft Office XP Professional – Excel:

Excel is the Cadillac of spreadsheet software. If you're not a database guru, you can use Excel to create a spreadsheet and then have Access convert it to a database for you. Excel files can be saved as web pages. Updating the Excel files can be done from the web automatically. Excel has a function wizard that accesses hundreds of functions for you to use when creating your work sheets. Excel includes a Clipboard task pane that allows you to copy up to 24 items to the Office clipboard for pasting into Excel. You can preview the contents of this clipboard and don't have to go between programs anymore for copying and pasting. Many improvements have been made to Excel that makes it even easier to use than ever before.

3. Microsoft Office XP Professional – Outlook:

My concern about installing Office XP was whether I would lose all my email settings, emails, etc.. A backup of my data allayed my apprehensions. The installation was very smooth. I was delighted. Within a short time the suite was installed. Upon investigation all my emails, folders, etc. were still intact. Some things had moved around and I had to reacquaint myself. The mail progress dialog is a little different as well as the mail Send/Receive message you see in the Outlook task bar. Searching for emails and messages is quite easy. As with the other Office XP products, the improved interface is better than previous versions. Mail send and receive seem to work faster and more efficiently. This is an excellent e-mail application. Voice recognition is also available in Outlook. From simply receiving email to setting reminders, to scheduling meetings, events and appointments, Outlook 2002 does it better. The new preview pane allows you to follow hyperlinks and display the properties of an email message without opening it.

4. Microsoft Office XP Professional – PowerPoint:

Microsoft PowerPoint 2002 is the presentation software to have. Microsoft has added numerous new and improved features. The new Task Pane gives access to many options. The Slide Design Task Pane has design templates, color schemes, and animation schemes. The Animation Schemes Task Pane give you access to many professionally designed animations to use in your presentations. You can now create multiple masters in one file. Built in diagrams make creating charts simple and easy. PowerPoint can be set to optimize images. PowerPoint supports insertion of animation, sound, narration, embedded documents, video, buttons, running external applications, establish an Internet connection, drawing graphic objects and more. At the bottom of the interface are the drawing tools. These allow you to draw graphics within PowerPoint. There are many new and improved things in PowerPoint.

5. Microsoft Office XP Professional – Access:

As with the rest of the 2002 product line included in Office XP, the interface is lighter. Options are at your fingertips or if using voice commands right in front of you so you can speak out what you want to do. For instance, when I want to open a file, I simply speak into my microphone the name of the file and it opens for me. I don't have to touch the keyboard at all. I can work using voice recognition, which allows me to concentrate on the work I want to do and relieves me from having to be tied to the keyboard. This can come in handy when you are just learning Access or any of the Office XP products. Your hands are free to hold the manual. For the most part Access doesn't appear to have changed much. It does run more efficiently on my machine and it does have some new features - the task pane of course being one that is universal in the 2002 product line. If you have never used Microsoft Access or any database software you will find Access easy to learn and easy to use. With Access you can do more than just store data. You can present it in a format that is organized and easily readable. You can create your own forms and reports for data entry and retrieval. You can also create Macros. Access includes wizards and templates that you can use to streamline your workload. Creating a new application by using wizards and templates is a big help although, the manual that comes with Office XP Professional looks small, it is packed with information to get you started creating your own databases and customizing them to fit your needs. If the manual doesn't have the information you are looking for, the online help is terrific and appears complete. Forms and reports can be saved as data access pages for viewing and editing from the web in a browser.

6. Microsoft Office XP Professional-Voice Recognition:

Of all the improvements to Microsoft Office, which are all great, I think the addition of Speech Recognition is by far the most beneficial tool. There are eight training sessions, which took about an hour. I then worked in Microsoft Word for a short time. For the most part I can get through a document without too many recognition errors. Being hands free and able to get all my thoughts down without having to worry about typing is a big relief. Once I got used to speaking and switching between "Voice Command" and "Dictation" I was set. The first thing you have to do to use speech recognition is to train the software to recognize your voice. More than one person can train the software. You train the software to begin with by using the built-in training exercises. You can do this as often as you like to increase accuracy. I did all the sessions once and then used Microsoft Word to continue the training. It's not the same when you use Microsoft Word. You create a document and then from the "Tools" option on the language palette you choose "Learn from this Document". New words that are not already recognized by the software can then be added. A list of words is presented to you and as you click each word to add it, you will hear a playback of yourself saying the word and then it is added. You can also add words manually from the "Tools" option on the language palette. Set up properties from the "Options" option from the "Tools" option on the language palette. You are not restricted to voice alone or keyboard alone. You can combine the two.

With voice recognition the work is done faster and with much more detail. I don't want to imagine working without voice ever again. I feel that all the new additions and the improvements to the Office suite are very important and very valuable, but by far the most valuable to me is the voice recognition feature.

Conclusion:

Although this suite may be a bit pricey for an individual, it is a sensible and productive investment, particularly for business applications. Efficiencies and professional improvements realized up front will pay for itself in the time that will be saved accomplishing the same tasks in previous versions. When integrated with voice recognition, Office XP provides a complete office application. The program has matured since 1997. It is a pleasure to work with a suite that does not do battle with itself.