Office 365 Solutions Are Changing the Game

by Kenny Leckie of Traveling Coaches

Office 365 has become a frequent topic of news, commercials, articles, advertisements, discussion boards, webinars and ILTACON sessions. But what is it and how is it different from Microsoft Office offerings of the past? Let’s get into some brief “level-setting” definitions, and then broaden our understanding of the ways Office 365 is changing the game.

Definitions
According to Microsoft’s Office 365 FAQ, “Office 365 is Microsoft’s subscription plan(s) that includes access to Office applications plus other productivity services that are enabled over the internet (cloud services). Office 365 plans for business include services such as Skype for Business web conferencing, Exchange Online hosted email for business and additional online storage with OneDrive for Business.

And it’s doing well! In July of 2017, Microsoft reported on its fourth quarter performance noting Office 365 consumer seats have grown to 27 million and Office 365 revenue surpassed license revenue for the first time according to Microsoft CFO, Amy Hood.

The Office 365 offering is more than just the locally installed Microsoft Office productivity software (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Outlook, Publisher and Access), but it includes them…and more. Office 365 is part of Microsoft’s “cloud first” strategy. It has opened the door to changing the way we do things in law firms. While there are some compelling home offerings, the focus of this article is on the enterprise level Office 365 subscription that most law firms will use and how it may change the cloud strategy and productivity solutions offered in your firm.
Office 365 Solutions Are Changing the Game

Areas Office 365 Is Changing the Game

» Licensing: Many have felt the not-so-subtle nudging by Microsoft to get firms to move to an Office 365 subscription. The first step is the licensing model. The good news is that it is possible to change your licensing model and not move from your on-premise solutions or change your locally installed Office applications. The licensing model is quite compelling and worth consideration.

Office 365 is licensed per user, not by install. So, as it relates to the locally installed version of Microsoft Office, historically, one install would be equivalent to one license. With Office 365, each user is entitled to five installs of the Office desktop applications. This change alone is great and really got my attention. This allows a firm to move away from perpetual and Software Assurance licensing to a per-user subscription. This can also replace the home use program and provide the firm the ability to only license for their current number of firm personnel. Scalability and manageability are two strong arguments for the Office 365 licensing model that benefit the firm AND firm personnel.

» Evergreen: IF your firm goes with the Office 365 licensing AND you go with the Office ProPlus Click-to-Run (C2R) version of the Office desktop application suite afforded you with this subscription, THEN you get to experience the game changing evergreen platform of Office. That means you will always have access to the most up-to-date version of the applications.

Microsoft now has a steady stream of feature updates to the Office applications. Updates get distributed based on the branch you have associated with the install, plus your firm can control what updates get distributed and when. If you put an MSI install of Office 2016 next to a C2R evergreen install of Office 2016 when they were first released, you could not tell the difference. Now, there is a large feature set difference.

This is the new pace and cadence of change coming from Microsoft. This change will require firms and their third-party application vendors to plan for the changes. It’s a brave new world and we must keep up. The good news is users will experience real benefits from these changes.

WHAT IS EVERGREEN?

Earlier this year I wrote a short piece on the concept of evergreen technology and explained “Evergreen IT refers to systems on a path of regular updates, and they are perpetually current.” Read more in “Evergreen is the New Black” in the Summer Peer to Peer issue.
Office 365 is changing the way we look at technology solutions in law firms and is moving our vision outside of the walls of our offices while providing essential safety and security.

Office 365 solutions are changing the game with several built-in benefits, such as single sign-on (SSO) and multi-factor authentication.

And, you guessed it, the hosted Exchange platform of Office 365 is also on the evergreen path and will always be current. This is new and places the onus of responsibility of maintaining and upgrading the Exchange environment squarely on Microsoft.

» SharePoint: SharePoint was built for collaboration and co-authoring. It is automatically part of the Office 365 platform and opens doors to business-class solutions to meet the demand for collaboration with internal and external resources to get our work done. OneDrive for Business is one example of an Office 365 component built on SharePoint. This solution allows us to place files in a secured, backed up and web-accessible business-class location that can be shared with and worked on by others inside and outside of our firm.

Before OneDrive for Business, people used solutions like their personal Dropbox or Google Docs accounts, which placed the information outside of the firm’s control. This is often referred to as ‘shadow IT’ and is a big problem for firms. The risks of this are clear, so the option to have a business-class solution that’s part of your subscription is a game changer.

» Skype for Business (soon to be a part of Microsoft Office 365 Teams): Communication doesn’t just happen in email or document collaboration. Instant messaging, screen and file sharing, presence awareness, conversations, video meetings and broadcast web events are all parts of the overall communication picture. Skype for Business (formerly Lync) is the glue that brings all these together and makes them a seamless part of the user experience. It is tightly integrated with the Office applications, accessible via the desktop, laptop, Mac or mobile devices and is changing the way the ‘day in the life’ of a law firm professional looks and feels.

» Other Web-Connected Services: In addition to the game-changing products and services listed above, there are other web-connected services on the Office 365 platform. Groups can now work together using Microsoft Teams in Office 365, where chat, content, people and tools come together, giving your teams instant access to everything they need. Yammer brings corporate social networking into the mix, allowing your firm personnel to connect with the right people, share information across teams and organize around projects. Office Online lets you create and edit Word, OneNote, PowerPoint and Excel documents from any modern browser. And there are other components to the Office 365 platform that are available now or coming soon. It is continually evolving and changing the way people work together.

Each of the components and services mentioned also allows secure mobile access wherever you are and on whatever device you have. I can access all the firm information via mobile apps on smart devices or via a modern browser on any platform machine. This brings everything I need to anything I can connect to the web. Of course, that brings me to the next game changer topic…
Office 365 Solutions Are Changing the Game

» Security and Information Governance: Mobile access to firm data must coexist with the firm’s security and information governance policies. They are not two opposing forces, but rather, two sides of the same coin that must work together. Office 365 provides administration options to control all the access and sharing in your firm’s organizational tenant. This means it is under your firm’s control and governance. Workflows must be defined and security measures such as multi-factor authentication, mobile device management, information rights management, data loss prevention and legal holds are available to make the interaction with Office 365 compliant with the requirements of your firm. It is our responsibility to read and understand all the terms of service, but the fact that these options are available as part of the platform is another game changer in my eyes.

Our Role is Changing Too
The options afforded by Office 365 are improving the way we provide technology to our firm personnel. Office 365 is changing the way we look at technology solutions in law firms and is moving our vision outside of the walls of our offices while providing essential safety and security. We are moving from implementing and maintaining technology to managing technology solutions for our firms. Office 365 is the direction Microsoft is heading—in a big way.

The expectations and demands of firm personnel and clients for connectivity, communication and collaboration options are changing. There is an increased necessity for maintaining, protecting and managing firm and client information while still allowing the mobility and connectivity that are essential to provide excellent legal services. Office 365 makes that possibility a reality.

It’s worth keeping an eye on Microsoft Office 365 and how it is changing the way we interact with technology and information. It’s been with us for six years and is gaining more converts each and every day. And looking to the future, also keep an eye on new things from Microsoft, like Microsoft 365, which pushes the goal further to provide more solutions instead of separate products. Microsoft 365 brings together Office 365, Windows 10 and Enterprise Mobility + Security. Interesting days of change ahead!

KENNY LECKIE
Kenny Leckie is a Senior Technology and Change Management Consultant for Traveling Coaches. With over 20 years in the legal industry, he works with firms to develop and deploy customized programs with an emphasis on user adoption and increased ROI. He is a Prosci Certified Change Practitioner, a Certified Technical Trainer Kenny is a finalist for ILTA’s 2017 Distinguished Peer Award for Innovative Consultant of the Year. Kenny can be reached at kleckie@travelingcoaches.com