New Microsoft Products Enhance Business Mobility, Productivity and Collaboration

As the Microsoft Inspire partner conference concludes in Las Vegas, it's worth reviewing recent Microsoft feature and product announcements. Whether you turbocharge collaboration with updated Microsoft Teams functionality or design a factory space with Microsoft Layout, key new Microsoft products bring enhanced mobility, productivity and collaboration to business in 2018.

True Mobility and Seamless Collaboration

Since its inception in 2012, the Surface line of touchscreen, ultraportable computers and interactive whiteboards has made steady strides. This year, the Surface family includes two significant upgrades to cement Microsoft's prominence in the market.

The Surface Hub 2 takes collaboration to greater heights with multi-user sign-in, as well as increased speed and higher resolution. Whether you tile multiple displays on the wall or use the sleek new rolling stand to move the Hub around the office, you will love the versatility of the improved design.

For users who crave portability, Microsoft takes another step forward. The Surface Pro LTE includes all of the same features as the Surface Pro 2017, but with the addition of built-in cellular connectivity. More secure than public Wi-Fi and more convenient than a hot spot, you will love this update.

Intelligent Teams

Introduced just one year ago, Microsoft Teams continues to evolve at a rapid pace. In a significant strategic move, Microsoft announced last fall that it will transition from Skype for Business to Teams. That means that by the end of 2018, Microsoft Teams will include most of the Skype for Business functionality.

Envision team members collaborating on an Office document. Colleagues can switch from messaging to a voice call or video conference on the fly. With the ability to record and transcribe the meeting, they can easily share the discussion with co-workers after the fact.

In addition to built-in Skype functionality, Teams users now have the option of launching events on-demand, viewable live and as recordings. These events might range from webcam live-streams to high-quality formal events. Integration with a host of third party applications, as well as an improved search bar and advanced artificial intelligence also boost utility.

Mixed Reality for Workplace Design and User Training

At the Microsoft Build conference in May, Microsoft announced two exciting developments that showcase the possibilities of mixed reality in business applications.

- **Microsoft Layout** — Design workspaces in 3D and then test out the room and furniture layouts in the physical space using a Hololens augmented reality headset. While in Hololens mode, users can edit and share layouts in real time.

- **Microsoft Remote Assist** — Harness the power of augmented reality conference calls. For example, new employees can conference with a mentor in another office, sharing a first person point of view. The mentor can annotate the live image, vastly improving the ability to solve problems and train employees over distance.

Office 2019

For businesses not quite ready for the move to the cloud, Microsoft has announced Office 2019. Arriving in the second half of 2018, the revamped on-premises version of Office will include popular Office 365 features such as Ink replay in Word and Morph in PowerPoint.

In addition, look for new charts and formulas for Excel, as well as server and security enhancements.

Productivity Enhancements to Windows 10

Continuing its pattern of semi-annual updates, Windows 10 adds a number of new features in 2018 designed to promote efficiency. Highlights include:

- **Nearby Sharing** — Microsoft's answer to iOS AirDrop. Share files or links easily with PCs in the vicinity.

- **Focus Assist** — Previously called Quiet Hours, Focus Assist allows users to define rules for notifications. During set times, users can turn notifications completely off, allow notifications only from apps and people specified on a user-defined priority list, or disable notifications except for alarms.

- **Timeline** — An enhanced Task View allows users to see activities from previous sessions below the currently open applications. This makes it easier to resume earlier activities, including web pages and documents. The Timeline syncs across devices.

- **Speedy Update Installation** — By accomplishing more in the background, Microsoft has reduced downtime during updates from an average of 82 minutes to 30 minutes.

- **Sets** — In addition to the taskbar at the bottom of the screen, users will be able to create "sets" that group different apps and web sites together. For instance, a researcher might create a set of tabs that includes a Word document, as well as relevant web sites and a related PowerPoint presentation.

Harness the Power of New Microsoft Products

Microsoft has also invested heavily in IoT this year with its Azure IoT Hub PaaS and Azure IoT Central SaaS offerings. In addition, the company recently unveiled a new Workplace Analytics feature in Microsoft 365 that harvests data from Office 365 to help teams avoid meeting overload and excessive after-hours work while increasing time for focused work.

With a host of options for businesses of all sizes, creating an optimal plan for implementing new Microsoft products and updates will maximize the benefits. Capable Microsoft partners bring a wealth of business technology expertise to the table. From world-class business cloud services to manufacturing solutions and retail IT infrastructure, they have you covered.