Chapter 1: What’s New in Office XP?

In this lesson, you learn about the new features provided by the Office XP application suite.

Introducing Microsoft Office XP

Microsoft Office XP is the latest version of the popular Office application suite. Microsoft Office XP includes Outlook, Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, and FrontPage. These different application tools enable you to tackle a large variety of business and personal tasks on the computer.

Microsoft Office XP offers a number of new enhancements to the Office suite. This lesson serves as a quick overview of some of these new features. Coverage of these features as they relate to specific applications in Office XP, such as Word or PowerPoint, are covered in the part of the book that is dedicated to that particular application.

Introducing Voice Dictation and Voice Commands

One of the most exciting new features in Office XP is voice dictation and voice-activated commands. If your computer is outfitted with a sound card, speakers, and a microphone (or a microphone with an earphone headset), you can dictate information into your Microsoft applications, such as Word and Excel. You also can use voice commands to activate the menu system in that application. The voice feature also has the capability to read text back to you over your speakers or headset.

Voice commands, voice dictation, and setting up the Speech feature are discussed in more detail in Lesson 4, "Using the Office Speech Feature."

Smart Tags Provide Quick Options

Another new enhancement that Microsoft Office XP provides is the smart tag. A smart tag is a special shortcut menu that provides you with additional options related to a particular feature. There are paste smart tags, AutoCorrect smart tags, and smart tags for dates, times, and addresses that you place in your Office documents.

Document A document is any file you create or use in an Office application. These files include Word documents, Excel workbooks, and PowerPoint presentations.

For example, in the case of date and addresses smart tags, if you are typing a letter to a new contact, you can quickly add the address information that you place in the Word document into the Outlook Contacts list. The different Office XP applications, such as Microsoft Word, automatically detect date, time, and address information and provide you with the appropriate smart tag.

Figure 1.1 shows a smart tag that has been placed on an address that has been entered into a letter. You can tell whether information has been "smart tagged" because it is underlined with a dotted red line. When you place your mouse on a smart tag, you can click to open a menu of options.

Figure 1.1
Smart tags provide you with quick access to additional options.
Notice in Figure 1.1 that, in addition to the name "Smith" having a smart tag, Word has underscored the date with a dotted red line, indicating the presence of a smart tag.

When you paste information into an Office application, you will find that a paste smart tag appears at the bottom of the pasted item. This enables you to access options related to your paste job, such as whether the information pasted should maintain its original formatting or be formatted the same as text or numbers that are in the same part of the document where you pasted the new information.

Smart tags are discussed throughout this book as you encounter them in the various Office applications.

**Introducing the Office Task Panes**

One of the biggest changes to the Office environment in Microsoft Office XP is the introduction of the Office task pane. The task pane is a special pane that appears on the right side of a particular application window. It is used in each Office application to house a number of features that were formerly controlled using dialog boxes.

For example, there are task panes for using the Office Clipboard and the Clip Gallery. Figure 1.2 shows the Insert Clip Art task pane in the Microsoft Excel Application window. You learn more about the task panes in Lesson 3, "Using Office Task Panes," of this part of the book.

**Figure 1.2**
Office task panes provide easy access to a number of Office application features.

**Using the Ask a Question Box**

Many Office users who have used previous versions of Microsoft Office will be pleased to find that the Office Assistant is hidden by default in Office XP. In fact, the help system can be quickly accessed using a new feature called the Ask a Question box.

This box is located in the upper-right corner of all the Office application windows. To access the Help system for a particular topic, you type a question into the Ask a Question box and then press Enter. A list of topics appears in a shortcut menu below the Ask a Question box that enables you to quickly jump to a particular topic. You learn more about the Ask a Question box in Lesson 5, "Getting Help in Microsoft Office," of this part of the book.

**Using Document Recovery**

Another new Office XP feature relates to document recovery when your computer crashes. When an Office application locks up and closes or when your entire computer crashes, a special Recovery pane opens the next time you start the application. This Recovery pane lists all the documents that were open in a particular application when the crash occurred.

Only the last saved version of a particular document, workbook, database, or presentation opens in the Recovery pane, but you can quickly reopen it in the particular application by clicking the document’s name. The Recovery pane is meant to get you back up and working on a particular document as soon as you restart your system and open the application that you were working with.
Understanding Product Activation

After you install Microsoft Office XP (which is discussed in Appendix A, "Installing Microsoft Office XP") and start one of the Office applications, a product activation window opens, as shown in Figure 1.3. You can activate Microsoft Office XP on only one computer; trying to activate it on subsequent computers will fail.

Activating your copy of Microsoft Office XP is crucial. If the product is not activated, it runs only for a limited number of times before it becomes deactivated and unusable. This new feature is an effort by Microsoft to stop software piracy related to Microsoft Office. You can activate Microsoft Office XP using the Internet or by phone. Just follow the prompts for activation after you install Microsoft Office XP from the Office CD.

Figure 1.3
Activation is required for you to use your copy of Office XP.

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