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Microsoft Copilot: Bringing AI to your desktop

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What is a copilot?

The term 'copilot' has received a lot of hype from Microsoft over the last several months in relation to several services, and it's easy to get confused about what is coming. Microsoft has used copilot to mean 'a chat-based interface that lets you interact with an application or service using natural language' – essentially, an AI assistant. This might involve summarising content or being guided on how to produce or modify content in the application.

Some copilots have already been released for various standalone services (such as GitHub, PowerApps and PowerAutomate), helping novices and professionals alike with developing code and applications.

Introducing Microsoft Copilot

Most of the recent hype has surrounded Microsoft 365 Copilot. Whereas most generative AI services like ChatGPT are trained on most of the text available on the public internet, Microsoft 365 Copilot expands the pool of information to include the data inside your Microsoft 365 tenant. Now, as well as understanding the context of what you're asking, they are also able to interrogate any data in your Microsoft 365 service and surface this to you.

For example, you might be able to ask it to generate reports using examples of previous ones – they're unlikely to be perfect, but could be a useful tool for drafting in order to fine tune, rather than writing the entire thing from scratch.

if you have Teams Premium, you could also ask the service for a summary of a meeting you missed and Copilot would look at the transcript of that meeting and provide a summary and list of actions; it could even allow you to ask further questions on what happened.

Microsoft Copilot is an umbrella term covering three component services which aim to provide a consistent experience between them. These are:

- **Copilot in Windows**

A new way to interact with the Windows operating system and applications using text e.g., 'turn on dark mode' and 'summarise this article', as well as adding Copilot services to Windows apps like photos and paint.

- **Bing Chat Enterprise**

An interactive way to search and generate content from internet sources, where data stays secured within your tenant and is not used to train language models.

- **Microsoft 365 Copilot**

An AI assistant accessible through various methods including Microsoft 365 Chat and each Microsoft 365 App, that can access and interrogate the organisational data you have access to, including email, calendars, and documents. You can chat to find information, summarise meetings & documents, and produce new content.

There is also a Copilot stack, allowing application developers to include copilots in their own applications.

The following summarises the costs & release dates for each service.

Service	**Cost**	**Availability**
Bing Chat Enterprise	Inclusive of M365 E3/E5 Otherwise, $5 per user/month	Available
Copilot in Windows	FREE (commercial customers)	From Sept 2023 (Windows 11 22H2)
Microsoft 365 Copilot	$30 per user/month	EA customers from 1st Nov 2023 Other commercial customers TBC

How do I get started with Microsoft 365 Copilot?

If you're an Enterprise Agreement customer, you can acquire licenses from November 1st via your Microsoft representative. For other organisations such as those acquiring licenses via CSP, we're still waiting on a release date.

When it's available to you, you'll need the following to adopt it:

- **Licensing**

Before adopting copilot, you need to already be licensing users using Microsoft 365 E3+ or Microsoft 365 Business Premium. You'll then need a Microsoft 365 copilot license on top.

- **Microsoft 365 Apps for Enterprise/Business**

To make the most out of Copilot, you'll need to be running the latest Office client which has the copilot interfaces built in, and to keep 'connected services' enabled.

- **Adopt M365 services for your business data** as far as possible - if the data isn't in Microsoft 365, it can't be interrogated.

To help with adoption, Microsoft has also announced Copilot Lab, a platform where you can experiment with Copilot and get feedback and training on usage.

What about security?

All data accessed and provided by the Microsoft Copilot services stays withing your Microsoft 365 tenant and is protected by the same security as other services. Your data and usage are not used to train the language models, instead its understanding of your organisation is stored in a 'semantic index' within your tenant.

Information is only surfaced and provided based on the content individual users have permission to access.

Is it worth it?

With the ability to access and understand your organisation's unique data via Microsoft Graph, it has the potential to be really powerful, with use cases including the ability to quickly summarise the content and actions of missed meetings, find relevant & related content you didn't remember you had, or generating first drafts of documents based on your existing content (though no doubt a human will need to proof-read it!).

While the price tag looks steep, if the service works as well as the hype says it will, it could well pay for itself if it saves an hour or two of an employee's time a month. Just keep an eye on usage using the Microsoft 365 Report centre to ensure it is being adopted by licensed users.

Waterstons has 25+ years' experience across the UK and Australia preparing and protection organisations from cyber threats. We are committed to assisting all organisations to stay agile and prepared in today's cyber conscious economy.

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