Table of Contents

Table of Contents..........................................................................................................................................................1
Introduction........................................................................................................................................................................2
Office 365 Summary............................................................................................................................................................3
Challenge 1: How do I get my website to rank higher in Google? ..........................................................5
Challenge 2: How do I share a spreadsheet with my partners and protect my calculations? ..........7
Challenge 3: How do I make working with a remote workforce successful? ........................................9
Challenge 4: How do I help my sales people fit in more meetings per day? ...........................................11
Challenge 5: How can I generate more and better quality leads for my sales team? .........................14
Challenge 6: How can I make every meeting in my business more effective? ................................16
Challenge 7: How can I encourage my staff to follow the Policy and Procedures Manual? ........18
Challenge 8: How can I help reduce the grip email has on my staff? .........................................................21
Challenge 9: How can I move our Access applications online? .................................................................24
Challenge 10: How can I collaborate more effectively with my clients and partners? ..................26
What’s Next? .................................................................................................................................................................27
Spread the Word............................................................................................................................................................28
About Talking Office 365 ...........................................................................................................................................29
About Marlon Marescia..................................................................................................................................................30
Introduction

The announcement of Office 365 in October of 2010 sounded the start of a new era of productivity for businesses of all sizes. For the first time Microsoft offered a substantial part of its productivity offerings not only as a complete package hosted online, but at a such a low price point, it almost seemed too good to be true. Well, the dust has settled and we now know that it is true and Office 365 will arrive around June (2011) this year.

So what is all the excitement about? Sure, businesses have had access to Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft SharePoint, Microsoft Lync and Microsoft Office in the past, but not with the ease of use provided by Office 365.

As a product suite, Office 365 will make your IT staff’s life much easier. There is more than enough information online, which answers the technical questions a business may have. A few Google searches will quickly reveal how Office 365 will reduce your IT costs, free up more time for your IT team and offer a more reliable, and secure service for your data.

But is that all? Can Office 365 give your marketing team the tools they need to attract qualified leads, make your finance department more productive or ensure the timely delivery of your projects?

The answer is a resounding “Yes!” This is exactly what I will be discussing in this ebook. Office 365 is not just a great solution for your IT team. It is a productivity suite for all your staff. As you read the following pages, think about your business and the new opportunities and efficiencies that lie waiting to be found once you move to Office 365.
Office 365 Summary

Before we start let me give you a brief summary of Office 365. Office 365 is Microsoft’s next generation of its Business Online Productivity Suite (BPOS). BPOS has been around for a few years and is Microsoft’s Hosted offering of Exchange Online, SharePoint Online, Office Live Meeting and Microsoft Office Communications Online. Office 365 now includes the following products:

1. **Microsoft Exchange Online** – This is the hosted version of Microsoft Exchange and provides businesses with an enterprise level email system with virus protection backups and 25GB of storage.
2. **SharePoint Online** - Microsoft’s Online version of SharePoint 2010. It is a cut down version of the SharePoint 2010 Enterprise, but includes many more features than SharePoint 2010 Standard and is outstanding value.
3. **Microsoft Office Professional Plus** – Microsoft has been attempting to offer Microsoft Office as a subscription for some time now, but it has never been a successful offering. With Office 365 I believe they have created a compelling offer for businesses. Users of Office 365 Enterprise can now install the latest versions of Microsoft Office Professional Plus as part of their monthly Office 365 subscription.
4. **Lync Online** – Many businesses today use video conferencing, VoIP, desktop sharing, instant messenger, and online meeting software. The brilliance of Lync Online is it offers all these services and more in a single integrated environment. On top of that Lync offers additional features like seeing the availability of a colleague from within SharePoint, starting an instant message conversation with a colleague while co-authoring a Word Document or booking an online meeting right from within Outlook. Never before has businesses had so many communication features offered in one familiar solution
5. **Microsoft Web Apps** – Microsoft has included Microsoft Web Apps as part of Office 365. This is Microsoft’s online version of Outlook, Word, Excel and PowerPoint. A user does not require any of these Office products installed on their computer to open and edit Office files.

Office 365 is a software as a service solution licensed on a subscription basis. For business there are two main editions:

- Office 365 for Small Business - $6/user/month
- Office 365 for Enterprise - $24/user/month

The game changer for business is all these products (except Microsoft Office Professional Plus) are hosted online by Microsoft. This means businesses don’t have to worry about installation, license fees or maintenance. A business can instantly start using these products with confidence knowing they will always work. As part of Office 365 Microsoft also offers:

- Virus protection
- Spam protection
• Backups
• Money backed service level agreement
• 24/7 phone support for Office 365 Enterprise Edition or community support for Office 365 Small Business Edition
Challenge 1: How do I get my website to rank higher in Google?

One of the best ways to raise your rankings in the Google search results page is to produce regular relevant content around the keywords your potential clients are searching for in Google. These two factors are most significant:

1. Google likes new content because it demonstrates that a website has not been abandoned or become stale. Google always wants to present the best quality websites to its searchers.
2. Google looks for web pages containing the keyword’s a user has typed into the search engine and presents the web pages it decides through its algorithm are the most relevant.

A business can give itself the best opportunity over time to get its website ranked highly in Google by producing regular relevant content that is keyword rich. One of the biggest challenges for businesses is time, and updating a website with new content is time consuming. A public facing SharePoint blog in Office 365 helps a business with this challenge.

A blog is similar to a regular website with the additional functionality of allowing users to easily add new content in the form of articles, with the newest article always being shown in the first position on the front page. Using a SharePoint Blog a user can add new content on a regular basis using the same SharePoint user interface they use every day.

Office 365 provides the tools to easily add regular content to your website for Google to use in its search results, but it is up to you to create this content. This may seem like a difficult task but believe me it is not.

Think about it, within your business you have hired staff who work with your products and services every day. Whether they be in sales, product development, project management or service delivery they are specialists in their field. The insight and experience they have with your service or product is significantly more than your prospects, so the value of this knowledge to your prospects should not be underestimated. This information will be perfect to share on your blog. If your potential prospects find this information on Google and find it valuable they will see your business as an authority in your industry, and will be more likely to contact your company.

Some easy ways of generating relevant content are:

- Case studies of your experience with past clients
- Insights into your industry from internal email conversations between your experts
- Discussion on your internal SharePoint forums
- Summaries of industry conferences your staff have recently attended
There are no more excuses. Quit complaining about how your business can never be found in Google. Stop relying on those SEO companies that promise the world and try to deliver results the easy way, causing more issues for your business. Take control of your internet marketing back into your own hands. Leverage the knowledge and the platform you have within your immediate reach. Start a SharePoint blog in Office 365 and tell the world how great your business is.
Challenge 2: How do I share a spreadsheet with my partners and protect my calculations?

Have you ever wanted to share an excel spreadsheet with a partner, prospect or client but hesitated because you realised how valuable the calculations behind the spreadsheet were? These calculations are often the result of years of experience and work and often make up the intellectual property (IP) of a business. Sharing this information with other businesses is often reckless and can lead to your competitors gaining access to your IP.

If you work in a small business, you probably decided to share it anyway and take the risk. If you work in a large business, company policy probably restricted you from doing so, so you may have had to develop a complex and expensive software application to hide the IP.

SharePoint Online as part of Office 365 offers an alternate solution called Excel Services, which is probably the most efficient solution possible. The power of Excel Services is an employee can create a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel. An end user can view and interact with the spreadsheet through a web browser, but is unable to modify the underlying calculations. The benefits of Excel Services are:

- End users can interact with the spreadsheet through the browser, so they don’t require Excel installed on their computer
- The end user can view the latest results of the formulas by recalculating data, refreshing external data sources the spreadsheet connects to; navigate to different worksheets, sort, and filter data.
- The end user cannot change the underlying structure of the spreadsheet
- Spreadsheet creators can give users access to specific parts of the spreadsheet based on their role and login credentials

Excel Services is perfect for:

- Sales reports – Sales people can view a common Excel spreadsheet only their activities, income, opportunities and commissions related to them even though the spreadsheet contains the information for all sales people.
- Financial projections – A business can distribute a spreadsheet requiring the income projections by the heads of each department without the without the danger of the underlying complex calculations being modified by mistake
- Financial Analysis Calculation Model – A financial institution can create a propriety financial model, which is distributed to their partner advisors for use with their clients. Using Excel Services, the partners will always have access to the latest version of the financial model, can access the model from their office using a web browser, can generate results for their clients at their convenience, but will never have access to the underlying formula that calculates the results

Excel services allows a user of Office 365 to create a simple or complex spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel, save it into SharePoint Online and then give access to that spreadsheet...
through an internet browser to colleagues, partners, clients or prospects whilst having confidence that the IP behind the spreadsheet is secure.
Challenge 3: How do I make working with a remote workforce successful?

The growing trend of hiring offshore or remote workers is well and truly on the rise. Businesses have realised the benefits of hiring staff that are not in the same geographic area as the physical office. With growing pressures to cut costs, businesses are realising that employing workers who can work from home does not just make sense, but can assist in their goal of reducing costs.

Research into remote workers has shown they are often more efficient when working from home than in the office for the following reasons:

- They feel they have to overcompensate to constantly justify their position in the business
- They have fewer distractions from colleagues throughout the work day and are often more focused
- Because they save so much time travelling, they feel good about working longer hours

A business may choose to use remote workers for the following reasons:

- The skills they require are not available from the general population in their local area
- They can hire a highly skilled person at a much cheaper cost offshore
- Real estate costs are high and they don’t want to invest more into infrastructure to run the business
- Workers may request to work from home and the business sees productivity benefits of remote workers

The challenge of using remote workers is to integrate and communicate them into the business the same an employee that works from the office. This is not as simple as it may first appear because communication and accountability can be difficult. As businesses work more with remote workers, the methods of doing so are becoming more refined. We are now able to learn from some of the experiences of businesses who have already been successful in the journey.

A company who does this well is Envato. They are an Australian based company which started about 5 years ago. They have a network of blogs and market places on the internet selling digital assets and providing training for creative people. What makes Envato so interesting is they have about 50 employees who mostly work from home and are scattered across the world. This business model has been outstanding for Envato because they have been able to employ the best creative people to work on their websites from across the globe who are passionate about their craft. Geography has not been a limiting factor. If they had been
limited to Melbourne Australia, I am sure they would not have been able to source employees of the same standard. This has been one of the keys to their quick rise to success.

Instant messaging (IM) allows two or more people to type text messages that are instantly transmitted to the other person’s computer. They are able to communicate in real time similar to a voice conversation. At SSW, we have an office in Beijing with a team of software developers. Over the last 5 years, we have used IM for 90% of all communication. Their English may not be strong, but they are brilliant technically and write in English very well. It is remarkable when you realise the power of instant message to get tasks completed in a business environment. Because you are typing questions and answers, you often only communicate what is essential to make your point. Instant message is an essential tool when employing remote workers.

![Instant Messaging Example](image)

Figure: Lync Online has instant message capabilities enabling remote workers to communicate quickly with the office

Lync Online as part of Office 365 gives a small, medium and large business not just instant message, but all the tools required to communicate with remote workers. These tools are enterprise level, but at cost even small business can afford. Lync Online includes the following features to enable successful remote staff:

- Instant message capabilities
- Video conferencing
- Voice Conferencing
- Online meetings
- Lync online is integrated into Office and SharePoint allowing staff to start communicating from the applications they are currently working

Employing remote workers is a great way to reduce costs and employ staff with hard to find skill sets. Lync Online and Office 365 give you the tools you need to successfully work with remote staff, allowing seamless communication and accountability.
Challenge 4: How do I help my sales people fit in more meetings per day?

Being an effective sales person is a challenging task. There are many pressures and obstacles in the road to success, but the good sales person knows how to make sure the decision maker is at all meetings, manage their time effectively and control the cost of the sale.

Challenges for Sales People

Decision makers

Firstly, to complete a successful sale you need to have the decision makers involved in each meeting. Sounds easy, well it isn’t and that is where the fun and games start in sales. Many sales people often go through the complete sales process with a representative from the company only to find that they won’t be making the final purchase decision. If you find yourself in this position you have to go through the whole process again with the true decision maker, but many times, you won’t even get that opportunity, because the decision maker wasn’t committed to the process from the beginning.

Lack of time

Secondly, you need to make sure that each meeting counts. There are only so many hours in the day and if you spend your time in meetings that will never convert into a sale, then you are restricting your ability to be successful.

Cost of the sale

Thirdly, costs to win the sale need to be controlled, so there is enough money by the end of the project to make a profit. In the economic environment we are in today, departments have been instructed to cut costs but still deliver the same or even better results. Office 365 provides a way for sales departments to reduce costs on interstate or international travel.

Solutions to Challenges for Sales People

Lync Online as part of Office 365 will give your sales people the ability to hold online meetings with prospects and customers from the convenience of their desk at work. Prospects and clients will also enjoy the same luxury. Lync Online offers the ability to:

- Share your desktop
- Use a virtual whiteboard
- Communicate using instant message, voice or video
- Book the online meeting from within the familiar environment of Outlook
- Allow the prospect to download the Lync client for free and install on their machine within a few clicks
- Allow the prospect to use the service without signing in making it easier to engage end users

**Figure: Lync Online enables sales people to hold video conferences reducing travel expenses**

**Decision makers**

At times decision makers are hard to get a hold of because they are very busy rushing from appointment to appointment. An online meeting lets them fit in a quick meeting in between those appointments.

**Lack of time**

The sales person doesn’t have to waste time travelling across the city, the state, the country or even internationally, enabling them to spend the saved time on more dollar productive activities.

**Cost of the sale**

The sales department can cut travel expenses significantly by eliminating significant travel by sales people.

Now, I know what you are thinking. The best sales meeting is a face-to-face meeting, and I agree with you. There is no substitute for reading a person’s body language and building rapport in person. However, the world of business has changed over the last few years and will continue to change over the next few. Prospects and clients are interacting with businesses differently than in the past. They are completing a lot of their initial research on the internet before picking up the phone to call. Therefore, when they call you they are very well informed.

Many are engaging with sales people on their terms and are used to the new tools of the internet like online meetings. Whether they want to save time or are willing to deal with a company in a different geographical location, online meetings are the new way of dealing
with prospects. If you are hesitant to try online meetings, you may not have an option in the near future. Prospects may start demanding them.
Challenge 5: How can I generate more and better quality leads for my sales team?

Attracting new prospective clients is vital to the success of any business. Marketing departments are always looking for new techniques to attract potential customers. Lately the business world has been abuzz with social media. Many commentators are discussing the validity of such marketing initiatives: some being for and some against. All the while, a handful of businesses are just getting on with it and receiving spectacular results from Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

Some businesses are also using webinars effectively as part of their marketing strategy. A webinar is similar to a seminar but instead of holding it at a physical location, the seminar is held online. Participants are able to sit at their desk at work and watch the presentation through their computer screen. A participant will usually watch a PowerPoint presentation and hear the presenter’s voice. Video is an option, but is riskier as you have no control over the participants’ internet connection, which may cause a drop in quality. To make the experience more interactive participants can ask questions using voice or instant message and even answer survey questions displayed on the screen.

Now geography is not a limiting factor. You can present your offer to people and businesses all over the world.

Webinars have already proved to be very lucrative for marketing departments for generating new leads. The key is to find a need and fill it. What are the questions your target market want answered before making a purchase decision? Answer these questions in a webinar and at the end of the webinar include a call to action or make an offer of value. The aim of the webinar is to move the prospect to the next stage in the sales process or to make a purchase.

Hubspot is a good example of a business doing this successfully. They hold weekly webinars offering valuable information for their prospective clients. This week I signed up for one of their webinars. In the confirmation email, they stated they have 17,000 registrants for the webinar! Wow! There is a statistic that says you will get 40-50% of registrants attend the webinar. If they work on a 1% conversion to their product, that is about 70 new clients, but I am sure they have a much higher conversion rate – not bad for marketing an online event and a one-hour webinar.

Hubspot are very successful when it comes to holding webinars, but don’t think your business has to secure 17,000 registrations be as successful. Depending on the product or service you sell, it is likely that 20 registrations from each webinar may generate one sale, which for a professional services company is significant.
Lync Online is included in an Office 365 subscription and has the full feature set required to host webinars for up to 250 attendees. The beauty of Lync Online is its familiarity and integration with the Microsoft Office suite of products. It will become familiar to your users just like Microsoft Outlook. Setting up and running successful webinars will be easy and the technology won’t be the limiting factor.

Figure: Lync Online gives your marketing department the ability to host webinars

There is no doubt webinars are an effective marketing tool. Whether you are a small, medium or large business, you now have the tool set to exploit this marketing activity. Only a few years ago, this technology was expensive and complicated. Today all businesses are on a level playing field in regards to marketing activities, so don’t sit back and observe, make it happen!
Challenge 6: How can I make every meeting in my business more effective?

Holding a business meeting is always expensive, as employees are not working on their core tasks for the duration of the meeting. On the other hand, managers become more productive by attending meetings through delegating, training and leading their team more effectively during the meeting.

The challenge is to turn decisions made in meetings into business benefits and to keep recurring meetings effective and productive. To make this a reality, the ingredients required are:

- **Objectives** – The objective of a meeting should be clear in the minds of each attendee and easily viewable by all.
- **Agenda** – A meeting without an agenda is like a ship without a rudder. Often the conversation will head off track and the purpose of the meeting will never be discussed. An effective meeting will have a standard agenda with a list of items discussed every time the meeting is held. Additional agenda items should be added to the agenda that are specific to each meeting.
- **Decisions** – A record of decisions should be created and published at the conclusion of each meeting so all attendees can view. This record should be easily found in a central location.
- **Tasks** – Each decision made should have a corresponding task or set of tasks created to ensure the decision becomes a reality. Responsibility of each task should be allocated to an attendee so they can be held accountable to complete or organise the successful completion of each task. The group should be able to create a list of tasks that can be reviewed in the following meeting.
- **Documents, files, links** – Any related documents, files and links for a meeting should be easily accessed in a central location for all attendees to view at their discretion. Any changes to these documents should be tracked using version control.
Of course, even with this tool meetings can still be very unproductive unless they have a strong and focused personality leading the meeting. Only the business can provide the right person for the job but SharePoint Online as part of Office 365 can provide the framework for the business to be as successful as possible once the right person is found to steer the meeting in the right direction.

![Decision Meeting Workspace](image-url)
Challenge 7: How can I encourage my staff to follow the Policy and Procedures Manual?

One of the best books written on creating successful businesses is "The E-Myth" by Michael Gerber. Michael's book has been a top selling book for many years and transformed many small to medium businesses by introducing them to a practice used by many large businesses - a policy and procedures manual.

Michael demonstrated how great businesses like McDonalds are successful because they document all the repeatable tasks in their business. At McDonalds every repeatable task is documented so every time an employee has to complete one, they do so in a manner described by the McDonald's policy and procedures manual. This creates an environment where staff complete tasks in a consistent way. You may not be a big fan of McDonalds, but one reason so many people return to McDonalds repeatedly is that they recognise the customer experience is always the same quality, with no surprises, no matter where in the world you dine.

A policy and procedures manual also allows a business to improve. With the whole business completing tasks consistently, it is easier for management and staff to identify any practices that can be better, make a change to the procedure and then retrain the employees affected by the change. With such clear ways for employees to complete common tasks, businesses like McDonald's consistently train their staff in the policies and procedures of the business keeping them accountable to best practices.

Once introduced to the concept many business owners have tried to implement this strategy, but many find it harder than expected for a few reasons:

1. **Staff involvement** – Documenting policies and procedures for a business is a huge task requiring input from all staff, not a select group. Essentially the best way to run your business lies in the minds of every staff member including admin, sales, finance and even the cleaner (in the case of McDonalds). If staff are not involved in the creation of these policies and procedures they will not be committed to following them

2. **Constantly improved** – Policy and procedures are meant to be living in the business, meaning they should be constantly changing and adapting as the business finds new and best ways of completing tasks

3. **Easily updatable** – They should be easily updatable by all staff, so modification and new procedures can be added while the staff are working, not at a later time which often never happens

4. **Easily found** – As the manual grows it is important for employees to find the specific procedures within seconds, otherwise they will lose interest and revert to relying on their own ways of completing tasks
5. **Communication and accountability** – Staff have to be constantly trained, re-trained and held accountable to these policies and procedures for change to occur.

Although the concept has the potential to turn a good business into a great business, the previous five roadblocks often prevents a business from making policies and procedures part of its DNA like McDonalds was able to do.

The wiki found in SharePoint Online as part of Office 365 has all the tools required to give a business the best chance at making policies and procedures a tool of transformation. The wiki allows employees to have a central location where they can quickly and easily update company policies and procedures.

![Image of SharePoint wiki](image)

*Figure: The Wiki in SharePoint Online can be used as an easily update-able policy and procedures manual*

The SharePoint wiki solves the five roadblocks in the following ways:

1. **Staff involvement** – All staff can be given permission to access and update the wiki.
2. **Constantly improved** – Employees can make changes to the policy and procedures as they see fit. Managers can refer to the version history of the pages in the wiki to see who made the most recent changes and what was changed.
3. **Easily updatable** – The wiki provides a central location where all policies and procedures can be stored including an easy editor to create, edit and update using a familiar interface like Microsoft Word.
4. **Easily found** – SharePoint search functionality allows employees to find information with a powerful search feature similar to Google search, so they won’t have to remember or hunt for relevant procedures.

5. **Communication and accountability** – SharePoint Online assists with communication and accountability by always having the policy and procedures manual readily available to view or update. The process of holding meetings and quality control is more complicated and requires involvement from management.

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*Figure: The SharePoint Wiki can be easily searched to find any policies and procedures when required*

Implementing policies and procedures into a business, that make a difference is a significant task. Many businesses have tried and failed in the past. Office 365 provides businesses with a robust toolset that when combined with essential management practices can assist a business in successfully implementing a policy and procedures manual, where staff are involved in the process and committed to the discipline.
Challenge 8: How can I help reduce the grip email has on my staff?

Email should not be used for clarification, but confirmation. Too many people respond to vague requests via email with a reply email asking for an explanation. This wastes much time and energy. What you should do is call or instant message the sender, clarify the misunderstanding and send a confirmation email summarizing the outcome of the conversation.

Figure: An example of a good email confirming the outcome of the discussion, not asking another question for clarification

Lync Online as part of Office 365 has a feature called presence, which shows when a user is online. Whether you are using Microsoft Word, SharePoint Online, PowerPoint or Outlook you will see a green box on the left side of a user’s name when they are online. Lync Online in conjunction with Outlook allows a user to start an instant message conversation with the sender of an email from within Outlook. So now when you need clarification on an email, you have no excuse to reply with a question. You can instant message the sender if they have a
green box next to their name, and resolve the issue immediately. The only email you will have to send is the one confirming the decision you both agreed on.

Figure: Lync Online helps users resolve potentially long running email conversations immediately.

When the message window is opened the subject of the title becomes the title of the message window. A link to the email is also added to the message window to give the recipient some context around the conversation. This all helps in assisting the parties to resolve the issue quickly and efficiently.
Figure: A link to the original email is added to the instant message conversation and the email subject is the title of the window

This one tip will stop email being used to avoid confrontation or slow down the decision making process. Your staff will make decisions quicker, and stop double handling emails, which is a major time waster for office workers today. Rereading and responding to pointless and never ending email threads is killing productivity. Office 365 will make your staff more efficient.
Challenge 9: How can I move our Access applications online?

I am very excited about Access Services because I work in the software development industry and am involved in building many line of business applications for our clients. We often have departments within a business approach us to convert their Microsoft Access application, which they have grown out of, into a more robust solution. These databases are often built by employees who are power users, have no programming experience, but are experts on the business. The two main problems businesses have with their Microsoft Access applications are:

- **Problem #1** – Database access is required outside the physical office. Microsoft Access was not built with the remote user in mind, so while it can be done, it is difficult and cumbersome.
- **Problem #2** – Having multiple people access the database simultaneously. Microsoft Access doesn’t support a lot of simultaneous users and often data corruption occurs.

Now to an experienced software developer, Microsoft Access is one of the most undesirable platforms to build a database because they have more powerful tools to utilize. But it is not built for experienced software developers; Microsoft built Access for business users who need to solve a business challenge very quickly. They often have a data set and need to store the data in a systematic way, perform calculations, quickly search and run reports to understand that data. Experienced software developers have had a lack of respect for the humble Microsoft Access for a long time, but Microsoft’s release of Access Services, has given Access some respect amongst some.

So what is Access Services? Access Services allows a business user to create a Microsoft Access database, and publish that database into SharePoint as a SharePoint site. Yes that’s right...convert it into a website! A business user now has the ability to create a database not only that is web enabled, but is part of SharePoint. This solves one of the main reasons businesses approach the company I work for, for help. Now that the database is a website, users who are not in the office can access the website through SharePoint. Problem #1 solved.

In addition, SharePoint is built to handle many concurrent users, so Problem #2 is now solved. The database does not become corrupt when multiple people access it simultaneously.

Once a Microsoft Access database is published to SharePoint, the data is synchronized both ways, meaning any changes to the data in SharePoint are moved to the Access database, and vice versa. It doesn’t stop there, any structural changes made to the database in Access, can also be updated in SharePoint.
Users now have the option of using Microsoft Access or SharePoint to access the database making the data much more accessible.

This is a giant leap forward for power users of Microsoft Access in businesses all over the world. Now they can create databases that are web enabled within a SharePoint site, giving many more users access to these databases.

It is amazing to think that this functionality is available for a small monthly fee of $6/user/month on the Small Businesses plan or $24/user/month on the Enterprise plan. Remember the Small Business plan does include Office Professional Plus which includes Microsoft Access 2010. You will have to purchase or already have a version of Microsoft Access to use Access Services on the Small Business plan.
Challenge 10: How can I collaborate more effectively with my clients and partners?

Office 365 through SharePoint Online enables company employees to create a password-protected portal in order to collaborate with clients or partners external to the business. The portal is based on a site collection (a mini website dedicated to a department, project or client in SharePoint Online). Employees can invite external users to view, edit, share and collaborate on site collections they have been given permission to.

As part of the site collection, external users can interact with document libraries, calendars, task lists, customised lists, wikis and web pages. For example wiki pages can also be created containing frequently asked questions for partners and customers.

Combined with the communication features of Lync Online, real time communication can be initiated with these external users while they are navigating the portal.

These portals are useful to share large files with external users, which are hard to email, providing a single location for the most recent version of the document.

Creating customer or partner portals in the past has been time consuming and labour intensive, requiring the involvement of very technical IT staff. With SharePoint Online an employee can be given site administration rights for a single site collection to grant access to an external user, using this user’s email address. The external user will use a Windows Live ID email address to access the customer portal. Sounds easy, well it is.

This extranet features of Office 365 is compelling for a couple of reasons:

1. It is easy to use and setup, putting full control of these portals in the hands of your end users, not technical staff
2. The extranet features can enhance the communication with your partners and customers, speeding up time to make decisions and collaborate, making your employees more productivity

Once again, Office 365 takes a once difficult to implement and expensive to setup technology, and makes it easy, affordable and accessible for small business.
What’s Next?

Office 365 will be released around June of this year (2011). Until then there are many ways you can keep educating yourself and getting your business ready for the move.

Join a Webinar

I am holding weekly Webinars at www.TalkingOffice365.com/webinars

If you want to learn more about the feature set of Office 365 and how you can use it to your business advantage, I encourage you to join one. I have had great feedback from the attendees so far.

Listen to the Podcast

Every two weeks I release an interview with either a Microsoft staff member, a Microsoft Partner, a consultant or a business who currently uses Microsoft’s Business Productivity Suite (Predecessor to Office 365) or is looking at using Office 365 and the related technologies.

The aim of the podcast is to discuss the benefits of Office 365 with the people who created it, use it or implement it for their clients. These interviews will become a valuable resource for businesses looking to implement Office 365 or trying to get the most out of their investment.

If you would like to be interviewed on the podcast please contact me via email or by using the social media icons on the website.

You can listen to the podcast at http://www.TalkingOffice365.com/category/podcast

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Spread the Word

I put a lot of effort into the Talking Office 365 website and associated resources to help decision makers, and business people understand and implement Office 365.

If you want to support the site, and me, the best thing you can do is spread the word about the site. Tell your colleagues, partners and clients about the site.
About Talking Office 365

Hi, my name is Marlon Marescia. I started Talking Office 365 because I believe Office 365 is a significant release for businesses globally. I believe Office 365 will give small to medium businesses (SMB’s) the same tools large businesses have benefited from for years, but at a fraction of the cost and effort. Even though Office 365 is a game changer for SMB’s, it will also give enterprise users so much more, for less than they had to invest in the past.

Microsoft will release Office 365 around June the year (2011), and has just released Dynamics CRM Online on the 20th January. The fact that Microsoft has already and will be releasing these two cloud based products so close together is no accident. It is no secret that Microsoft is pushing their tools into the cloud (or online) as they see this as a key growth area. Google and SalesForce.com have built strong businesses in the cloud and Microsoft is now following.

The reality is that Microsoft is not just following; they are setting a much higher standard than their competition in regards to features and pricing. This is a wonderful thing for businesses all around the world as these major technology companies strive to go faster, higher and stronger to compete for the privilege of calling your business a client.

My aim is to provide relevant, useful information so business people can use Office 365 to make their businesses more productive, by using the following tools:

- **Podcasts** where I will interview industry specialists who are using Office 365 to make a difference in businesses today
- Quality **articles** explaining the benefits and advantages of Office 365 for business
- Video Tutorials and Online Training (coming soon) showing you demos of Office 365 in action
- Weekly **webinars** to introduce you to the tools of Office 365 at a time that is convenient with you

This website is created for business people, c-level managers and end users of companies looking at Office 365. I will eliminate all IT jargon and make the information enjoyable and relevant.

If you have any questions or comments I would love to connect with you. You can contact with me via the social media sites on the website or by email.

Speak soon.

Marlon Marescia.
About Marlon Marescia

Marlon Marescia is the Sales Manager at SSW a Microsoft Gold Partner working with SharePoint, Dynamics CRM and building custom software solutions for line of business applications. Before moving into the IT industry 5 years ago, Marlon owned his own business for 10 years. During that time he also worked with Business Thinking Systems a strategic and operational planning company, which created plans for businesses and then worked with the team to implement the plan over the next 12 months.

During this time Marlon assisted many businesses in a diverse range of industries. He observed what made some successful, while others struggled to make a profit. He also noticed how the core functions of all businesses are the same. Core functions like administration, IT, finance, human resources, marketing and sales.

By implementing software solutions into his own business Marlon also saw how technology can be an enabler to for many of these core functions. This lead him eventually into the software development industry where he has helped businesses use technology to become much more productive.

Marlon has been working with the technologies that make up Office 365 for about five years now with large businesses and knows the potential benefits many small businesses can now realise using the product suite.

Marlon is so passionate about Office 365 because he sees it as the beginning of the commoditisation of IT productivity solutions. No longer will businesses focus and spend their money on implementing and maintaining these solutions. Companies like Microsoft at a low cost will complete this behind the scenes. In the future the focus and budgets will be spent on making the users get maximum productivity from each solution.

Marlon lives in a beach side suburb of Sydney Australia with his wife and his 4 boys. (3 of them under the age of 4)

You can connect with Marlon through:

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