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2,011 Words about Word 2011



I am often asked what software program I spend the most time with. My peers figure the bulk of my digital docket is spent polishing pixels in Photoshop, along with inordinate periods of tweaking kerning pairs in QuarkXPress. Sure their guesswork has at least some basis in reality, but they are still off the mark. Since first touching a computer back at the dawn of time, I have eternally quested for a better way to record and process words.

In journalism school I learned to type on one of those cool IBM Selectrics, with the spinning ball that made such a satisfying CHUNK sound as it embossed my words on flimsy sheets of yellow newsprint. Being a student, of course, I could not afford a Selectric of my own, so the bulk of my writing was hammered out on a grimy, old boat anchor – a Royal typewriter was my loyal companion. Whenever I was on a tear, pushing 100 words per minute, I often outpaced the ribbon's ability to keep up and was forced to stop and clear the jumble of hammers and inky fabric before finishing my thought.

And when I did not get my story right the first time, I would take my double-spaced sheets of tattered newsprint and cut them apart with scissors. I then painstakingly re-assembled my sentences with scotch tape, making edits and pasting in new phrases before submitting my final article. To live my life as a non-linear thinker, it was clear I needed a better way to deal with words.

During one summer break from college, I worked as a typesetter at a local printer and a Compugraphic 7500 became my word processor of choice, simply because I could rearrange, edit and save the stories I wrote after-hours. However, printing onto 8-inch photo paper was a bit of a problem.

Not long after I encountered a Commodore VIC-20: The first personal computer I could afford. I was soon pounding away on its little keyboard into a rudimentary word processor that I had programmed from a magazine – recording my stories to a cassette data drive. I had died and gone to word-processing heaven. My newfound nirvana did not last long, however, as the rapid evolution

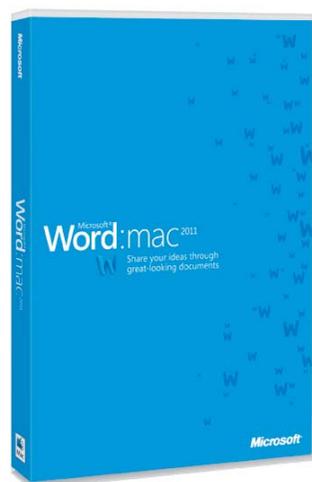
of personal computers and word processors was now underway.

Microsoft established an early lead in the enterprise with their ubiquitous MS-DOS, then Windows operating systems. In 1983, the very first iteration of Word was distributed free-of-charge on a floppy disk with *PC Magazine*. At the time, WordPerfect was the acknowledged master of word processing – but Microsoft persevered, continually improving Word with regular updates. Within a relatively short time, Word became the global standard for text-based documents and continues to wear this crown today.

What about the Mac

Word for Mac has been around for a long time... in fact, as long as there has been a Mac. Microsoft debuted its stalwart word processor for Apple's upstart in 1984, becoming the first major software developer for the nascent Mac OS. In those days, Microsoft actually had a significant influence on the evolution of the Mac OS interface, as the early features of Word's graphical user interface formed a template for other developers to follow.

Since those halcyon days, Microsoft's relationship with Apple has vacillated between friend, investor, developer, legal adversary and student of Apple's intellectual property. And all that time, Mac Word has been dragged along for the adventure, sometimes lagging behind its PC sibling,

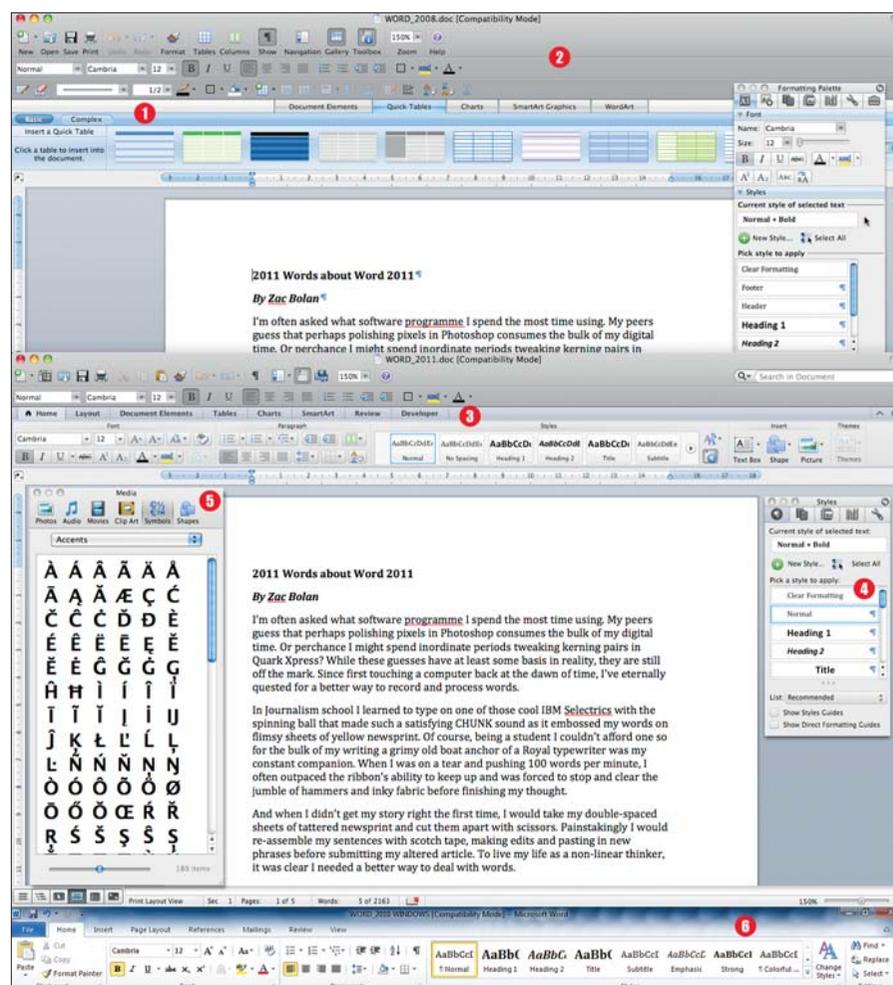


other times leading with new and oddly innovative features.

With the release of Mac Word 2011 and Windows Word 2010, the conjoined twins have come full circle, finally boasting feature parity (for the most part), compatible file formats, and relatively standardized graphical user interfaces.

What's new in Word

So how does Microsoft add new features to an application that has not fundamentally changed its functionality over the last 14 versions? Word 2011, now with extra... words? The answer lies squarely in the user experience. For starters, Word 2011 is much



Significant interface changes have evolved since Word 2008's awkward GUI (top).

The Word 2011 GUI (middle) utilizes the Ribbon to better organize functions.

- 1 The vertically challenged Word 2008 GUI gobbles up screen real estate.
- 2 Wide open spaces in the Word 2008 GUI.
- 3 Word 2011 features the Ribbon to access logically grouped functions.
- 4 The new Toolbox is smaller and better organized.
- 5 Word 2011 includes a comprehensive Media Browser.
- 6 Windows Word 2010 GUI.

faster than its predecessor. The program launches quickly and all functions seem considerably snappier than Word 2008.

Then there's the interface: Microsoft was heavily criticized for the drastic and somewhat cartoonish GUI overhaul in Mac Word 2008. Besides hogging far too much screen real estate (a real concern when using a 12-inch Powerbook), Word 2008 put far too little functionality in its huge menu bars. Word 2011 rectifies the situation by adopting the Ribbon GUI model from its Windows sibling, Word 2010.

The new GUI is really quite simple to use – all the tools above the Ribbon deal with basic tasks like file management, templates, printing, cut, copy and paste. These will be immediately familiar to anyone used to previous versions of Word. Below this area, the Ribbon runs horizontally across the screen and displays a tabbed interface used to navigate between logically grouped functions. For example, *Home* includes basic and advanced formatting while *Layout* deals with margins, page breaks and so on. The Ribbon also provides context sensitive toolsets, such as image editing functions when a picture is selected. Relative to the 2008 version, the Ribbon brings vast improvements to Words' GUI.

Inspired by Apple's Pages, Word 2011 greatly improves access to its template gallery. Though touted as a new feature for Word 2011, everything this new gallery accesses was tucked away somewhere within Word 2008. It's just easier to get to now.

The gallery is displayed on startup or can be accessed through the Menu Bar and allows users to select from recent documents as well as a wide array of useful templates, including publishing layouts to be used for creating professional-looking DTP docu-

ments. Users can also add their own templates or configure the gallery to show their favourites.

Word 2011 features multiple collaboration features including *on-the-spot interruptions* utilizing either Messenger for Mac 8 or the included Communicator for Mac 2011. If any of your contacts are online, their presence can be seen on Word's status bar along the bottom of your document. Users can then initiate or accept text-, voice- or video-based communications with online contacts. While potentially useful for collaborative editing environments, I personally do not need the distractions of seeing my buddies show up while I'm working. I will never turn this on!

Browsing at the Media bar

Another feature seemingly inspired by Apple software design ethos is Word's new Media Browser. The browser centralizes access and search for all the media buried in your Mac as long as it's being managed by one of Apple's iApps, such as iTunes or Aperture.

Interestingly, when accessing Movies within the Media Browser, users can navigate through the Mac OS default Movies folder. Oddly, the same is not true when browsing Photos as users are restricted to accessing images within iPhoto, Aperture or Photo Booth. To insert an un-managed image into a Word document, users still need to use the menu bar to select *Insert > Photo > Picture from file* then navigate to the image as in Word 2008. However this is likely a "Mac thing" rather than a Microsoft shortfall as the Media Browser in Pages is similarly constrained.

Not satisfied with the just the basic media, the Word 2011 Media Browser one-

Continued on page 32

ups Pages as it also includes Clip Art, Symbols and Shapes from Microsoft's bundled libraries. The Symbols pane is particularly useful for locating those hard-to-find accents for international formatting and foreign language words.

Co-authoring has been added to Word 2011, allowing multiple users to work on a document simultaneously. This is achieved through *Sharepoint* in enterprise environments, while small and home office users need a Windows Live ID to share files with Microsoft's *SkyDrive* technology. By the way, if you have a Hotmail address, you have a Windows Live ID – just log into Hotmail for access. Once you are logged in, click on *Documents* and your Word files stored through SkyDrive are accessible. Double-clicking your document will launch a Web App version of Word 2011 that is limited in functionality, but perfectly useable for basic editing and writing functions.

Back to the Visual Basics

One of Word's most useful features, historically, has been the ability to automate repetitive tasks and record macros using Microsoft's Visual Basic for Applications (VBA), which was inexplicably eliminated from Word 2008 – much to the chagrin of longtime Word power-users. Thankfully, VBA is back in Word 2011 enabling users to once again extend the capabilities of the application.

Continuing on the visual thread, the beautiful and complex documents people

manage to create in Word never ceases to amaze, particularly when considering that most are building with little or no knowledge of page-layout applications. Any printer who has dealt with a complex Word document, such as a contract or Request for Pre Qualification, appreciates the difficulty of finding multiple Styles embedded in someone else's document. New in Word 2011 is a Visual Styles tool to provide numbered and colour-coded guides to the styles used. When enabled, you can differentiate at a glance between *Heading 1* and *Title* styles, for example.

While not new, Word's Publishing Mode has been enhanced in Microsoft's 2011 version of the program. On the Windows' side of the fence, the standalone Microsoft Publisher application has long been the bane of the commercial printing, as secretaries felt empowered to build un-RIP-able newsletters on their desktop PCs and deliver a file in .pub format. Thankfully, Word 2011 provides most of the MS Publisher functionality along with some good basic layout templates and tools without throwing yet another proprietary document format into the prepress ring. Documents formatted in Publishing Layout are still native Word .docx files and can be saved as PDF files as well.

When its time to preview your Publishing Layout masterpiece or complex document Word 2011 includes a full-screen view similar to Photoshop or InDesign's presentation mode. Word 2011 takes the mode a step further, however, with user-configurable background options and a dynamic page turning effect visible when previewing

the document in reading mode.

Another often-overlooked layout mode in Word is the useful Notebook Layout. I've long been a fan of MS OneNote in the Windows version of Office. This application enables you to make free-form notes, insert clippings from Webpages, record audio and a bevy of other useful features when documenting a meeting or listening to a lecture at school. At a press event for the launch of Office Mac 2008, I cornered a Microsoft product manager and asked why they had never produced OneNote for the Mac OS: "Take a look at Word's new Notebook Layout," she replied.

While not achieving full feature parity with OneNote, the Notebook Layout in Word is surprisingly useful for documenting on the fly. One touch audio recording accesses your Mac's microphone to capture audio while you make notes either by typing or freeform scribbling with a mouse or trackpad. Users can organize notebooks in sections as in a 3-ring binder and include graphics and webpage clippings on their pages.

Still a ways to go...

It must be difficult working in Microsoft's Mac business unit. After all, at any minute Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer might grab your new iPhone out of your hands and smash it on the cafeteria floor. I realize this is an extreme example (*it really happened*), but it does illustrate that anti-Mac culture runs deep in Redmond, Washington.

The coders attending last years Apple World Wide Developers Conference, however, revealed that Mac Word 2011 still does

not utilize Apple's current Cocoa frameworks, nor is it 64-bit. As a result, there remains some glaring disconnects between Mac Word and most other applications written for Mac OS X.

For example, Word's equivalent of the Inspector Pallet is called the Toolbox, and inexplicably you must flip it over by clicking a small icon to access the palette's settings. The toolbox settings pane is black and seems out of place. And while the settings are exposed, you are locked out of the Word document.

Imperfections aside, the answer to my opening question should be apparent by now. For years, I have spent countless hours working with Microsoft Word on a daily basis – both Windows and Mac versions. Based on the speed and GUI overhaul alone, I don't have a choice... I need to own the latest version of Word.

I know there are MS Office alternatives out there – Open Office comes to mind. But anyone relying on Word to make a living will tell you that there is comfort in knowing your precious work is safely entombed in Words global standard .doc or .docx format. Word has become the Photoshop of locution.

Ironically, my Mac died as I was finishing this review. But, because I was trying *SkyDrive* I didn't actually lose any work. I just walked into the IT manager's office and asked for a loaner laptop while mine was in the shop.

"Does it have Word on it?" I asked, apprehensively.

"You bet..." ☎

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