

Product Review: Microsoft Publisher 2007

by

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Background: I've been a casual user of MS Publisher since version 98, though I've been using the 2000 version since upgrading in 2001. By casual user, I mean that I've used it for monthly newsletters for scout troops, promotional and informational documents, occasional celebratory cards, invitations, post cards, and award certificates. This involved using the provided templates, clip art, and original work and images. As these projects were generally simple, the existing templates and available clip art were adequate to the task. Layout and production were usually straight-forward and the basic tools were intuitive. I often used two-sided printing and this worked fine. For a time, I collaborated on a newsletter with another committee member. This was problematic as the document size was very large, making the draft newsletter difficult to e-mail back and forth for review as the other editor was limited to a 10MB mailbox on his broadband account. Even a two page newsletter with a images could result in a 15MB file. This meant additional editing of clipart and images was needed to reduce the source image file size before insertion, rather than just scaling the image to fit. To e-mail the final newsletter, it was converted to PDF format, which usually resulted in a file of a few hundred KB at most.

Installation of MS Publisher 2007:

The hardest part of installing the software was figuring out how to open the case! First time I've opened one of the new plastic packages and couldn't defeat the sealing tape without a shape tool.

I installed Publisher 2007 on my media workstation. There were no prior versions on this device. Installation and product activation on first run worked fine. I opted for the full installation, which required 865MB of hard disk space. It loads quickly and offers connectivity to the Microsoft Office Live area (registration required) for additional clip art and template themes. With 150,000 additional clipart images available, it would seem easy to find something useful. There were four or five product updates available for downloading and installation.

In accordance with the user license, installation on a second device is authorized, so I also installed it on my laptop for mobile use when out of the office, as I don't have remote desktop access to my media workstation. This had Publisher 2000 installed. I was presented with the option to upgrade the current installation or install Publisher 2007 separately. I opted for the separate installation as I have several archival .pub documents in 2000 format and I wasn't sure about what the 2007 version might do with these. Installation and activation and updates were completed without any issues.

First run:

Publisher 2007 opens with a catalog of Publication Types. Within these types, are presented with Classic Designs, Newer Designs, and, in several cases, Microsoft Office Online Templates. Some of these Templates span several Publication Types, allowing the theme to be consistent among brochures, fliers, and even with a web site. A Customization frame is available to modify the color and font schemes. The user can create and save personal templates. Like any application, productive use requires exploration, practice, and repeated use to be proficient. The wizards are useful but only go so far.

What I was immediately curious about was whether .pub document sizes were more efficient due to image and other optimizations. I made a copy of a Publisher 2000 promotion document that

was 7767KB. I opened it in Publisher 2007 and saved it under another name. The resulting document was 895KB. This is quite a size reduction. I printed both copies from their respective versions and there was no noticeable difference in print quality. However, I noticed that as I printed the 2007 version, 10MB were spooled to the printer, so there is quite an effective compression algorithm working. It does make collaboration between users more reasonable if drafts are transferred via e-mail.

Output:

There are some changes in the output file types that Publisher 2007 documents can be saved as. Word processor outputs still don't support graphics, which is a bit disappointing. More useful of the new file types are the image formats; gif, jpg, png, tif, bmp, and wmf, which would allow easy embedding of the Publisher output into another document or web page. HTML output is also good, though some parts of a page may be captured as an image, thus making text edits problematic. There is a Microsoft plug-in for Office 2007 applications that can be downloaded and installed to add Save as PDF or XPS functionality to Publisher 2007. Highly useful for distributing e-copies.

Conclusion:

Getting precisely what you want out of Publisher 2007 is not harder, nor easier than prior versions, unless having more templates and clip art is useful. Creative content is still up to the user and always will be. The file compression is very important and helpful. The image output types have great potential, especially for web content. The newer design templates are nice. For someone who provides professional or voluntary services, a couple of uses of these templates for an event, reunion, or meeting would easily justify the discount price of \$161 currently available for the full install version. Upgrade versions (Publisher 2000 or higher) are running about \$94.