

The Many Versions of Microsoft Outlook

This month, we will explore the myriad versions of Outlook – Microsoft’s “Swiss Army Knife” email-calendar-contacts application.

Microsoft continues remodeling Outlook with new “window” treatments, menus, and other under-the-hood doo-dads to “improve the user experience.” As for me, I haven’t had a notably enjoyable “user experience” with Outlook in more than thirty years, but millions of folks use it, so maybe they do.

A Brief History of Outlook

Microsoft initially developed Outlook for the business community as part of Office 1997. It rolled up a company’s email, calendar, and contact lists into a non-tidy package that some corporate “IT Guy” named Brian presided over.

Outlook also provided a company-wide “Global Address List” that only Brian understood. You could also set up your own private contact list and view it as a matrix of virtual cards (ala Rolodex) with infinite settings for fonts, column size, and groupings selected through myriad menus and drop-down dialog boxes that bristled around the periphery of the screen.

There was also a web version of Outlook that used Internet Explorer.

Microsoft’s Windows included a “lite” version called “Outlook Express” for home computers. It was much (much) simpler than Outlook, and you didn’t need Brian to manage it.

In 2007, Microsoft replaced Outlook Express with Windows Mail, Calendar, and the aptly named People address book. It was simple to use, and separated the mail, calendar, and contact functions into their separate applications. Nice.

The “New” Outlook(s)

Alas, Outlook was getting a bit long in the tooth, and Microsoft recently offered a “New” Outlook as part of Microsoft 365. New Outlook provides a simpler set of menus, but if you like the “old” Outlook, you can keep it (at least for now). (This reminds me of “New Coke” and “Coke Classic,” and we knew where that went.)

For home users, Microsoft is now replacing its free Windows Mail, Calendar, and People apps with a lite version of Outlook as part of Windows 11. You can continue using Mail (if you ever were), but at some point, Mail will go away, so it’s Outlook for everyone.

But wait—there’s more!

There’s also a new web browser version of Outlook! It looks a lot like Outlook 365, but it’s free.

And Microsoft didn’t forget Apple folks – so there’s a Mac version of Outlook, too, but the Apple Mail app is much easier to use.

If all this sounds to confusing, well, it is. But we can help. Just go to **Tech Lab – Center for Modern Aging Princeton** (cmaprinceton.org) to set up an appointment.

