



Your Weekly guide in a Changing World.
Written and edited independently by Barry Neethling
Sponsored by First Technology Group

12th October #188

New for this Week

- As a user of Microsoft technologies, you are receiving this publication to stay informed about critical topics such as Microsoft licensing, price increases, end-of-life dates, technical updates, security notices, and more.
If you do not want to continue receiving TOP STORIES, click on the unsubscribe link at the bottom of the mail.

- **Another 3 New vendors: Blackkite, Darwinbox, Carbonite** are added.
- **DarkWeb Weekly Intelligence Report #188**- The bad guys are very smart!
- **Everybody Hates a Queue** - but we know how to fix that!
- **DELL's first RTX Spark** - Expensive, Powerful and on a waiting list!
- **Microsoft's next Chapter** -The end? Think again!
- **A Bad Driver?** - It must be Microsoft - well, maybe not
- **Licensing resources updated** - everything updated for October
- **Microsoft Search** - Now with keys to your local files.
- **Teams Deepfake protection** - still needs 3rd Party protection
- **Last update for Win11 24H2** - October Patch Tuesday - Don't Delay!
- **Phishing your AI through Remote Access** - It will never end
- **AI is rebuilding Applications** - Some took decades to develop!

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DarkWeb Executive Report #188

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BUI scans the DarkWeb continuously for Hacker signals and Ransomware attacks.

Click above for the report from our live dashboard that we will publish weekly (but is actually updated continuously). This is part of the DarkWeb monitoring services included with many of BUI's managed services offerings. **This report is live, and this is a "snapshot" of the top 10 events as of Sunday Afternoon.**

Last Week's Top Stories

SignUp for the Archive

You can click the top button for last week's edition or sign up for access to the archive with AI assistance to read from #1

Newest additions to FirstMarketPlace

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Blackkite
Darwinbox
Carbonite

Are added for this week.
Click the link above for more information on these vendors

New Movies for this week

Digger Dug a hole Maybe it will become a cult classic and an Oscar for Tom!

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But... Did you Know you do not need to hate a queue!

Two hundred people walked into your branches this morning. Each one believed they were the one who mattered, and each one was right.

This trick is really hard to pull off. Serve hundreds a day, and still make each person feel like you were expecting them.

Qmatic does exactly that.

Every company's requirements and services are different, but maybe they can book before they leave home, so there is an appointment with their name on it. They check in from their phone at the door (we can even help you provide free, secure WiFi?).

They go to the person who can actually help, not just the next available somebody. Maybe they can wait in a coffee shop instead of a plastic chair, because a message tells them when it is their turn.

Maybe the coffee shop ALSO needs to care about it's customers in a queue too?

They get asked how it went while it is still fresh. And your managers finally see what is happening on every floor, in every branch, every day.

It plugs into what you already run. Salesforce, SAP, Microsoft 365 calendars, Power BI. Nothing gets ripped out.

Artificial intelligence (AI) now answers the phone at eleven at night and books the appointment.

An assistant on your website works out what someone needs and tells them which documents to bring, before they arrive.

So what does waiting feel like in your reception, right now, this morning?

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our Qmatic specialists, along with our integration, data and digital signage teams, who can help you design a complete customer journey for your business..... one that treats thousands of people as individuals, gives them an experience worth remembering while they wait, and opens up opportunities sitting in your own reception area that nobody has thought to look for yet.

The queue is not going away. What your customers feel while they stand in it is entirely up to you.



Dell's first RTX Spark XPS is here

Microsoft's 7 October announcement puts hybrid intelligence at the centre of its Windows strategy.

Run suitable AI tasks directly on the PC, reach into the cloud

when more capability is needed, and give agents controlled access to do useful work on your behalf.

The aim is to make AI more responsive while helping those increasingly expensive cloud tokens go further.

Dell's XPS 16 Creator Edition is one of the first machines bringing that direction to market. Its NVIDIA RTX Spark platform combines an Arm-based processor, Blackwell graphics and memory shared between them, giving creators and developers substantial local computing capability.

BUT..... the entry price is US\$3,799.99, with 32GB of unified memory and a 512GB SSD. US pre-orders are open, with shipping expected from 16 October. At nearly four thousand dollars, the AI may be local..... but the invoice is substantial!

A 16-inch 3.2K Tandem OLED display, HDMI, an SD card reader and a chassis just 17.8mm thick make this a serious portable creative workstation. Higher configurations will offer up to 128GB of unified memory, allowing much larger AI models and creative projects to run locally. That is NOT what the entry price buys.

For customers, the interesting calculation is whether faster creative work and reduced cloud consumption justify the hardware premium. Microsoft's new Copilot capabilities will arrive over the coming months, so the announcement does not mean everything is ready today.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect with FTG's hardware and AI specialists. They can assist with evaluation units, subject to availability, test your applications and workloads, and assess performance, compatibility and costs before you commit.

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Dell's first RTX Spark XPS is here

Microsoft News

The Microsoft 7th October event

Here is a summary of key issues from the event that may have been missed amid the Nvidia Surface Ultra announcements.

Below are the ones important for companies that regard Microsoft as a strategic partner.

Microsoft's next AI chapter, the right intelligence, in the right place, under control



Microsoft's 7 October Windows, Surface and NVIDIA event brought some impressive hardware.

But the message businesses should take away reaches well beyond buying a more powerful laptop.

Directions on Microsoft's assessment provides a useful starting point: Microsoft wants local AI to appeal beyond developers, with potential benefits in cost, convenience and productivity.

Microsoft calls this hybrid intelligence. The business principle is straightforward: choose AI with the capability the task requires, run it where it makes practical sense, and keep it within the organisation's security and management framework.

Buying the biggest AI engine or using the smartest cloud option for every desk could produce a very impressive invoice!

There is certainly power available. The Surface Laptop Ultra, built around NVIDIA RTX Spark, combines a Blackwell RTX GPU with a Grace CPU and up to 128GB of unified

memory.

Microsoft says suitable configurations can run models exceeding 120 billion parameters locally. Its announced starting price is US\$2,599, with availability beginning on 16 October. South African pricing, configurations and stock need checking.

The broader range extends from everyday Copilot+ PCs to powerful developer machines and planned DGX Station systems capable of serving multiple agents. Cloud capacity remains part of the picture.

The choice should follow the work: required accuracy, response time, data sensitivity, application compatibility and total cost.

Microsoft's planned routing capabilities aim to help allocate tasks across local and cloud models.

More capability also demands more control.

Microsoft Execution Containers, or MXC, became generally available on Windows 11 at the launch.

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More capability also demands more control.

[Microsoft Execution Containers](#), or MXC, became generally available on Windows 11 at the launch. They allow integrated agents to operate within defined boundaries for access to files and networks, enforced while the agent runs.

Microsoft is also extending its control plane: the identity, policy, visibility and management systems that determine what agents may do.

Windows integration with Entra and Agent 365, and Intune management of MXC policies, are still forthcoming. Customers must distinguish available protection from demonstrations and roadmap promises. Microsoft's containment and governance details

The [CNET supercut](#) makes the intended design easy to understand. Microsoft demonstrated an agent encountering malicious instructions on a webpage, Defender blocking the attempted action, and the agent losing access to SharePoint while the employee retained access. Controlling the agent separately from its user matters.

[Satya Nadella's 10 October article](#), "Models as Insider Risks in the Super Intelligence Era", reinforces the argument. Powerful models can make mistakes or be compromised. Their permissions, safeguards and audit evidence therefore need independent controls. **His central principle is to "separate the supply of intelligence from the authority over it."**

BUI's position on this is that an agent can take an inappropriate action using perfectly legitimate permissions. Logging the action helps an investigation. Stopping the agent afterwards may limit further damage. Neither brings confidential information back once it has escaped. Permission boundaries and checks before consequential actions are essential.

The employee needs protection too. Secure identities, managed devices, controlled access to corporate information and continuing practical training. Running AI locally still requires security. Buying a licence still requires deployment, adoption and ongoing management.

First Technology Group's capability is now relevant.

FTG brings together hardware and infrastructure expertise, licensing, First Digital's AI development and implementation, and BUI's Microsoft cloud, identity, data protection and managed security services, and FirstNets extensive hosting and connectivity capabilities.

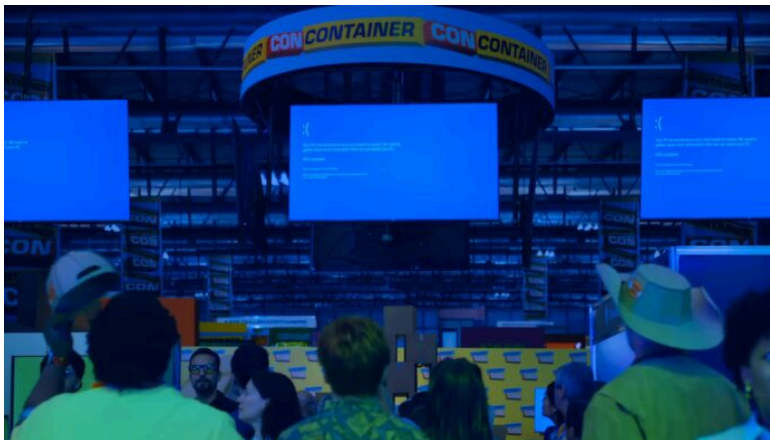
These disciplines can be coordinated across the group to deliver and operate the complete solution.

Contact your First Technology Group account manager to identify the right AI capability, decide where it should run, and establish how it will be secured and managed and licenced and monitored thereafter, as now the licence is only the activation. E5, CoPilot, Agent 365 and even E7 ARE in your future!

FTG brings ALL the necessary capabilities together through ONE group, from the licence and the hardware to implementation, security and ongoing management.

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Directions: Microsoft makes the Case for running workloads on PC's



A bad Driver, and Windows is blamed

Your PC freezes, crashes or restarts.... and Microsoft gets sworn at!

Sometimes deserved. But NOT always!

Drivers are the software that connects Windows to your hardware, and many are written by hardware manufacturers rather than Microsoft. Some run inside the Windows kernel, the core of the operating system, where they are not isolated from other critical components.

One faulty driver running there can bring down the ENTIRE operating system. Microsoft's own documentation explains why.

So the Windows logo on the crash screen does not necessarily identify who caused the problem. A graphics, networking or other third-party driver could be responsible. Microsoft still has its own bugs to fix, but Windows reliability depends on considerably more than Windows itself.

Microsoft is tackling this through its Driver Quality Initiative, working with hardware and chip manufacturers to improve driver security, reliability and performance.

The changes include strengthening drivers that must operate inside the kernel, moving suitable drivers into isolated user-mode processes, and expanding Microsoft's own shared drivers. The aim is to reduce the chance that one component failure takes everything else with it.

Microsoft is also tightening partner verification and driver checks, retiring outdated or poor-quality drivers from the Windows Update catalogue, and measuring performance, power consumption and heat alongside crashes. These are practical improvements beneath the surface..... rather more useful than moving another button!

Intel's Wi-Fi release notes already identify improvements aligned with Microsoft's quality initiative. Its latest graphics driver also lists Windows 11 26H2 support, but that does NOT mean every planned driver-quality improvement has arrived. This is continuing work across the industry. Intel Wi-Fi release notes, graphics driver details.

Keeping Windows patched is essential..... keeping the rest of the machine current matters too.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to arrange a review with FTG's engineers. Have them check Windows patches, manufacturer-approved drivers, BIOS and firmware, test compatibility and verify that updates have actually installed. Their device-management and maintenance services can help keep machines supported and up to date, and investigate recurring crashes before another working day disappears into a restart.

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Microsoft: Targeting and fixing bad drivers

Microsoft Licensing resources updated October

- **The Power Platform Licensing guide has been updated for October** and can be [downloaded here](#).

October brings more Copilot related terminology and licensing changes.

Microsoft 365 Copilot is increasingly being shortened to simply Microsoft Copilot, while the guide now includes additional detail covering App building through Copilot Cowork and Copilot Studio.

The new Copilot Managed Runtime name also appears here for Microsoft's hosted infrastructure supporting these Apps.

- **The Dynamics Licensing Guide for October can be [found here](#).**
The big October change is support for headless commerce, allowing businesses to build their own specialised storefronts while still using Dynamics 365 Commerce behind the scenes for pricing, promotions, inventory and order fulfilment.

Microsoft has also introduced two new add-on licences

- Headless Import, for importing completed retail transactions captured outside Dynamics 365 Commerce
- Headless Orchestration, for processing third-party retail transactions through Dynamics 365 Commerce APIs

If you run customised retail platforms, this is worth reviewing carefully.

- **The Copilot Studio Licensing guide can be [found here](#).**
App building is the big change this month.
Copilot Studio can now build Apps, in addition to its existing Agent and Workflow capabilities, with the new functionality entering Paid Public Preview.
Microsoft has also changed some terminology. What was previously called the Microsoft-managed host is now the Copilot Managed Runtime Host.
It is another indication that Copilot Studio is expanding well beyond simply building agents.

Microsoft's Copilot, Power Platform and Dynamics licensing models are becoming increasingly interconnected. Contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect with their Microsoft licensing specialists and make sure the changes are understood before they affect architecture or licensing decisions.

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Microsoft: Modern Work Plan comparison Documents



Windows Search..... finding AND getting things done!

As covered in TOP STORIES #185, Microsoft has been working to make Windows 11 faster and less demanding.
Now Search is getting attention..... alongside Copilot gaining more access to the files on your PC.

The rebuilt Windows Search has a cleaner, single results list, better handling of typing errors and, according to Microsoft, improved speed and lower memory usage. No benchmark figures have been published.

More interestingly, type “turn on Bluetooth”, “switch to dark mode” or “dim my screen”, and Search offers the action directly.
It can also minimise windows or arrange applications on screen. Less hunting through Settings to find something that was apparently somewhere else last week!

And then there are your files.

Copilot's AI-powered semantic search on supported Copilot+ PCs allows you to describe the document or photograph you want, rather than remember its exact filename.
Very useful when your filing system consists of “Final”, “Final2” and “Final_REALLY_FINAL”. ummmm we all guilty!

Microsoft is now expanding this further. With your permission, Copilot will use relevant local files and recent activity, organise documents and carry out tasks

across Windows. Microsoft calls this Hybrid Intelligence, combining models running on the PC with cloud AI where needed.

BUT... accessing local files does NOT mean everything stays local. The permissions you grant, the information involved and where processing happens deserve attention before handing an assistant the company's documents.

Microsoft expects to begin rolling out these expanded capabilities on Copilot+ PCs over the coming months, with availability varying by device and market.

The redesigned taskbar Search is separately in an English-only Insider Experimental preview, with no general release date announced.

Useful progress..... provided users understand both the shortcuts AND the permissions.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with their Microsoft specialists to assess device readiness, user adoption and appropriate controls for these capabilities.

These capabilities are going to arrive VERY quickly, and it is so important to be prepared - especially around security.

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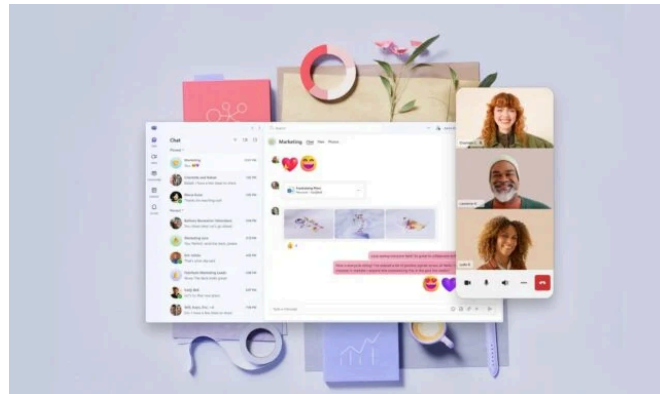
**New Search controls
settings**

**Microsoft Tests New
Search**

Microsoft hands CoPilot Keys to your files

Microsoft Teams Deepfake Protection Is Coming

Seeing somebody on a video call used to provide a little reassurance that you were actually speaking to them.



Increasingly..... that assumption could become expensive.

Microsoft is planning to start rolling out support for third-party deepfake detection in Teams from November 2026, covering Windows, Mac and web users.

Certified providers will analyse meeting audio and video for signs of AI-generated or manipulated content, sending detection signals back to Teams so warnings and controls can appear inside the meeting.

BUT..... the third-party provider performs the detection. Teams supplies the integration. Do NOT assume this means every Teams licence suddenly includes a free deepfake detector. Provider availability, licensing and configuration need checking.

Microsoft is also planning separate Impersonation Protection from November, displaying warnings about potentially deceptive meeting participants and organisers. This is listed for mobile as well as desktop and web. Both features remain in development, and rollout dates can change.

And Zoom? It already supports third-party options. Reality Defender's Zoom Marketplace app offers live audio and video analysis to flag suspected deepfake impersonation.

Protection still depends on having the appropriate service deployed..... simply using Zoom does not mean it is active.

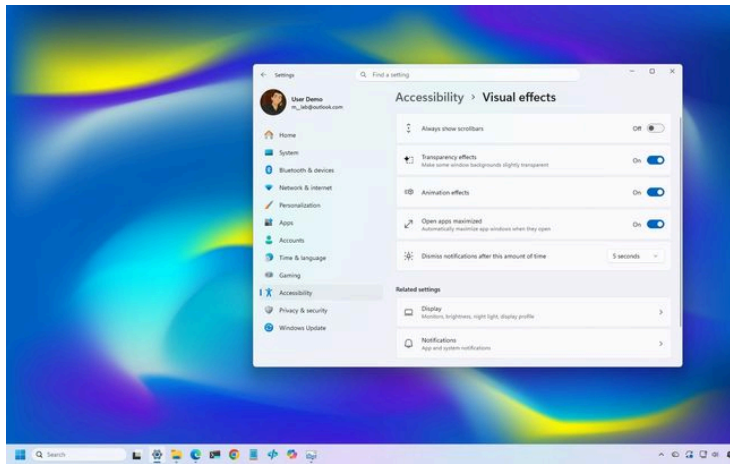
Useful technology, but the human remains the weakest link. An urgent request from somebody who LOOKS and SOUNDS like the boss still needs independent verification. Staff need ongoing practical training, and sensitive requests should be checked through a known contact route.

The boss asking for an urgent payment may be real..... the payment still needs the normal approval process!

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with their Microsoft, collaboration (Teams and Zoom) and security specialists to review available protection, licensing and staff awareness training.

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Microsoft Teams gets DeepFake protection



The last update for Win11 24H2

October's Windows 11 Patch Tuesday update is expected on the 13th (tomorrow).

As warned in TOP STORIES #181, #182 and again in #185, this is the last scheduled security

and quality update for Windows 11 24H2 Home and Pro. Enterprise and Education 24H2 remain supported until 12 October 2027, so please check BOTH the version and edition.

Installing October's patch does NOT extend that support deadline. Affected Home and Pro machines also need to move to a supported Windows 11 version.

There are useful improvements coming as well.....

File Explorer gets better PDF previews, remembers which Home sections you expanded or collapsed, and improves cloud-file thumbnails. There is an option to open applications maximised, additional touchpad scrolling controls, a refreshed Magnifier and a new Tips widget.

The Copilot key can also become Right Ctrl or the Context Menu key, as covered in TOP STORIES #186..... sometimes, progress means giving a new key its old job back! Features will arrive gradually, so everybody will not see everything immediately. And yes, updates CAN cause headaches. TOP STORIES has covered enough of those!

BUT..... avoiding updates can create a much bigger headache. Once support ends, newly discovered vulnerabilities can remain unpatched. "It still works" becomes progressively less reassuring. With AI the bad guys are exploiting vulnerabilities within hours of them becoming known.

The practical approach is to check known issues, test business applications, drivers and security tools on a pilot group, then deploy in controlled waves with a recovery plan.

Test properly, deploy promptly, and keep the support clock in view.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect with their Windows deployment specialists, identify affected PCs and arrange the updates AND version upgrades required.

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Updates and Changes for October Patch Tuesday

Security

Phishing Attacks Exploit Remote Management Tools and AI Email Assistants

In TOP STORIES #187, CSuite used legitimate remote management software to give criminals access to a victim's PC. In #186, a fake antivirus renewal could lead to a "support" call asking the victim to install remote access software.



Same trusted tools..... wrong person at the other end.

Fortra recorded 475% more phishing attacks involving remote management tools in the first nine months of 2026 than in the whole of 2025, in campaigns targeting North American financial institutions.

A fake bank warning leads to a convincing support page, followed by instructions to install software such as AnyDesk and provide the connection key. The criminal now has access to the computer. The software is genuine..... the support person isn't.

And now there is another "person" to fool..... your AI assistant.

Barracuda has identified phishing emails carrying hidden instructions aimed at the AI. These can try to make the assistant describe a malicious message as legitimate or urgent, or insert a request to change a supplier's banking details into the summary. You might never see the hidden instructions, only the reassuring answer.

Once again, the human being remains the weakest link. Anyone can be caught by surprise, frightened by a banking warning or reassured by a helpful AI. "The AI said it was safe" is becoming another dangerous reason to drop your guard.

Security awareness cannot be an annual tick-box exercise. Training must be regular, practical and continuously updated. Teach staff to verify unexpected support requests through known channels, NEVER grant remote access to an unsolicited caller, and independently confirm payment changes.

An AI summary is NOT independent verification.

Technical controls must support that training: restrict remote management software to approved tools, limit AI permissions and require independently verified human approval for sensitive actions.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with FTG's security specialists to review these controls and arrange continuously updated, targeted staff awareness training.

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Cloud & AI

AI is rebuilding the applications..... but who secures the business?

Photoshop, Word, Excel, PowerPoint..... even voice tools competing with ElevenLabs. AI is helping developers build alternatives to applications that took established software companies years to develop.

And some are being given away for free.

ArtCraft has used AI to create seven open-source Adobe alternatives.

The same team has Office alternatives, while VoiceStudio's developer says he uses Claude Code and AI agents to build a local alternative to ElevenLabs.

Even Linus has been testing one of them. His team tried Photon Studio, a separate Photoshop alternative, and found useful functionality..... along with enough problems to keep professional users cautious.

[Watch the review here.](#)

These are still developing products. Looking like the original does not mean every feature works, every file survives the journey or somebody will answer the phone when it doesn't!

Nor does open source automatically mean unrestricted use or established copyright clearance. VoiceStudio, for example, has a free application, but its speech models have separate terms, including non-commercial restrictions on the default model.

BUT..... do not let today's rough edges distract from where we are heading.

Businesses need to be open to this change. Existing assumptions about what software costs, who can build it and how quickly it can improve are being challenged.

Then comes the important question.

Who secures the business when everybody can build, download and connect their own applications?

Who controls access to company information? Where does the data go? What can an AI agent do with it?

Who patches the software, monitors its behaviour and stops it when something goes wrong?

This is where Microsoft's security strategy becomes particularly relevant. Through Agent 365, Microsoft is extending Entra, Defender and Purview to help organisations govern agents, control access and protect data.

My view..... assuming Microsoft disappears because somebody can recreate Word or Excel misses how much businesses depend on the environment around those applications.

Be open to the innovation. Test it. Understand the licensing. Secure it.

And remember..... the human remains the weakest link.

A useful-looking free download can still persuade somebody to bypass every rule IT put in place.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with FTG's security specialists and First Digital's AI specialists to assess new applications, establish appropriate guardrails and keep staff security awareness training current. A New World is being born out of AI.

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Secure Agentic AI

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