

.top_stories

//barry_neethling

23rd February #155

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.

- **Did You Know EWS is ending soon?** Everybody is Impacted! Read below.
 - **Another 3 New vendors** CrowdStrike, Nozomi and BeyondTrust are added.
 - **Microsoft EoL section Updated for January 2027 - Note the Biztalk Zombie!**
 - **Microsoft Teams Licensing Changes** - See below for updates.
 - **Win11 Virtual Desktop Licensing guide**- See below for changes.
 - **Modern Work Plan Comparison updated** - Microsoft issues updates monthly.
 - **M365 Gaps in your Backups** - Good idea to review your backup processes.
 - **Windows 11 adds new Security Baseline** - Stops software you don't want!
 - **Work starts on Win11 27H2** - Is this "make or break" for Microsoft?
 - **The Human is the weakest Link** - Us humans are so full of faults!
 - **Serious Flaw in Windows Admin Centre patched** - good idea to check everything!
 - **Google Launches Gemini 3.1 Pro** - This is a MAJOR improvement!
 - **Intel's Nova Lake coming Soon!** - We are still waiting for Pather Lake!!!!
 - **Microsoft insists 2026 is the year for the AI PC** - There are some handy features.
 - **Maximum resolution of the Human eye and choice of display** - [document here](#)
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Did You Know?

Time is running out!!!

EWS ENDING SOON!

Is Your Business at Risk?

ERROR 403

March 1, 2026
PARTIAL BLOCK

October 1, 2026
COMPLETE DISABLEMENT

April 1, 2027
FINAL SHUTDOWN

AUTOMATED EMAILS FAILING?

- Workflow Breakdowns
- Missed Alerts & Approvals
- Compliance Nightmares

ACT NOW!

MIGRATE TO

 Microsoft Graph & OAuth

OR

 Secure Mail Relay 

TIME IS RUNNING OUT!

Prepare Before EWS Shuts Down!

Exchange Web Services in Exchange Online is being retired..... automated system emails can stop overnight.

- **1 March 2026**, EWS blocked for F1, F3 and Exchange Online Kiosk mailboxes, HTTP 403 errors
- **1 Oct 2026**, EWS disabled tenant-wide by default in Exchange Online
- **1 Apr 2027**, final shutdown

If you rely on email-driven workflows, **get an EWS dependency check** and a migration plan to Microsoft Graph and OAuth, or a secure relay where that is faster.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our Exchange specialists (we have a lot of them) to help see if you might be affected. Often, there are processes that have been running for years that you might have forgotten about, until they suddenly stop. Having a check done of your environment might be a good idea.....

Microsoft End of Life to January 2027

Summary of what to know up to January 2027.

Click above for the highlights. The detailed PDF to download is at the bottom. P.S. we DID warn you about EWS retirement.....

Intel's Panther Lake

DRAM prices have already tripled.

The shortages are REAL!
MORE price increases MARCH.
Quotes only valid for 14 Days!!!

TOP STORIES #154

Click button above for last weeks news.

Lenovo urges for Orders ASAP

Visit FirstMarketPLace

CrowdStrike, BeyondTrust, Nozomi have been added for this week. See below for LinkedIn

Our LinkedIn

Movie releases

Get all the releases for the next 4 weeks in South Africa.
Coming up: "Hoppers"
Next big movie for 2026 is "Hail Mary".

Upcoming Shows

Review what happened at CES and see links for NAMM 2026 ISE has wrapped, it was big, and even Microsoft was there with Teams!

Request Account Manager

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Microsoft News This Week

Microsoft Teams Licensing Changes

This has been covered in previous TOP STORIES editions, but this is very important to be aware of, so here is another reminder....

Microsoft Places, Places Finder and Places Explorer are being included in licences that already include Teams and Outlook calendar access, giving richer room and space discovery with floorplans, images, and map based browsing inside Teams and Outlook

The Teams Shared Devices licence is being renamed Teams Shared Space, expanding from shared phones and panels into shared desk management. One licence can cover up to four spaces, enabling desk booking and basic utilisation analytics

Advanced town hall and webinar capabilities previously tied to Teams Premium are being included with Teams Enterprise for events up to 3,000 attendees, plus a view-only experience up to 10,000.

New Attendee Capacity Pack add ons can scale events up to 100,000 attendees.

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our Certified Teams specialists, so you can understand how you are affected by these changes and how best to take advantage of them!

[Teams Licensing Changes](#)

[Teams changes FAQ](#)

Win 11 Virtual Desktop Licensing guide

Microsoft has refreshed the Windows 11 for Virtual Desktops Licensing Guide for February 2026.....

- The guide includes updated tables showing which licences grant rights for the various virtualisation options
- A new entry has been added across the tables for the Microsoft 365 E3 and A5 Student Use Benefit
- The tables have been reorganised to group similar licence types together, making comparisons easier
- New wording confirms that users licensed with VDA E3 or VDA E5 can access Windows 11 virtual machines running on the dedicated servers of Listed Providers

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our Virtual desktop specialists to help ensure that you use this Virtual Desktop technology to improve resiliency in your company.

[Microsoft Virtual Desktop Licensing Guidance](#)

Modern Work Plan Comparison Document Updated

The February 2026 Modern Work Plan Comparison documents have been updated.

In the Enterprise version, Teams now correctly shows as included in the standard Office 365 plans, and Microsoft Defender Experts Suite has been added.

Everything else is mainly tidy-up work, small formatting fixes, and minor wording corrections.

Please contact your First Technology Group Account Manager to connect you with our Copilot and Dynamics specialists to help you understand how you are affected and how you can take advantage of these changes.

[Modern Work Plan comparison Feb 2026](#)

Microsoft 365 Backup Gaps Persist

Microsoft Infrastructure availability does not replace your companies responsibility for backing up your own data.

The retention policies that Microsoft has in place are for compliance purposes and are NOT operational restoration processes. There are even aspects of 365 that are difficult to back up and almost impossible to restore! It's important to know where there are challenges and how you get around them.

These backups will become increasingly complex in the near future where you will be needing to worry about backing up users' AI memories!!

Please contact your First Technology Group Account Manager to connect you with our M365 backup specialists who can help ensure you have the correct backup and restore strategies in place for ALL aspects of how you use M365.

Redmond

Bringing 2018(ish) backup into 2026...and common misconceptions

- The Growth of the Cloud**
 - 100 PB of content/month in 2021
 - 2.5B files/day
 - Storage Problem → Performance, Cost Problem
 - ~155M active users → 430M paid commercial seats
- Backup Strategies**
 - Servers/hardware → Data and configurations
- Attack strategies and targets:**
 - On-Premises vs. Online
 - Sophistication of attacks
 - AI

Common Misconceptions

- "Microsoft takes care of it for me"**
Microsoft provides infrastructure uptime, not your data backup
- "Retention = Backup"**
Retention policies preserve data for compliance, not for restore

M365 Backups - Not so Simple

Security



Work on Win11 27H2 started

Not a typo! It also looks like Windows is forking into separate builds for ARM-based computers and another for Consumer and Enterprise users. Microsoft needs to somehow get this right or the migration to Linux for Gamers and consumers will accelerate. I do not think there will be any move away Windows in enterprises as Microsoft will be more careful against making the operating system too intrusive.

The priority right now is to ensure that in corporate deployments, the OS is kept as lean as possible to

get the maximum performance out of 16 Gig of RAM, which is going to get very hard indeed to do. Try to keep buying machines with 32 GB even if you have to compromise with slower RAM.

Security will remain paramount and the integration of AI safely with Win11 will probably remain the only bet corporations will be able to take.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our desktop operating system specialists to ensure that you are getting the maximum performance with the least amount of bloat AND be able to deploy patches efficiently along with new major updates.

Microsoft Adds a New Secure Mode

Proof: The Human IS the weakest Link

If you are booking a holiday for April, PAY ATTENTION!!!!!!

A new phishing campaign is targeting customers and partners of booking.com in a sophisticated

attack that abuses their trust to steal money and credentials, eventually leading to "guests" being diverted to a "look-alike" payment page.

A key part of getting tricked is creating a sense of urgency that you will lose your booking unless you pay immediately.

This attack depends on the hotel staff and the guests getting tricked into not being careful by creating a sense of "drama" and urgency.

CyberDexterity has published a very interesting insight (see **"Trust Betrayed"** below) into HOW you get so easily tricked - which is by triggering "truth-default" process in our minds - Familiarity → Authority → Proof → Consistency.

Add urgency + confidentiality + plus impending loss, you have a perfect storm - which is like the booking.com attack! There are many more as well.

PLEASE contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our training specialists to help ensure everybody is kept up to date to on how handle the latest trickery. These tricks are only going to get more sophisticated, and it is important to stay constantly updated and aware of how these attacks can cleverly manipulate you into doing something you deeply regret.

These attacks are awful - they our attack our innate desire to trust.

[Booking.com attack](#)

[Trust Betrayed - Please Read](#)

Privilege Escalation in Windows Admin Centre patched

Microsoft has disclosed a flaw in Admin Centre that has now been patched. It is very serious as a standard user with an infected app can achieve "full compromise".

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our security specialists to help ensure your environment is fully up to date with patches!

[Microsoft Admin Flaw](#)

Cloud & AI

Google Launches Gemini 3.1 Pro

Google has quietly launched its new model, DOUBLING its reasoning power while improving inference speed without sacrificing accuracy. This stealthy release of the 3.1 could prompt enterprises that have been following a dual strategy with AWS and Azure to take a closer look at Google. Of course, the other AI companies will try to catch up quickly and remember that through the paid version of CoPilot, you actually have Access to GPT 5.2 AND Claude Opus 4.1.

Although there is no announcement from Microsoft as of today, it is likely Microsoft will upgrade to Claude Opus 4.6 soon making CoPilot very attractive diverse AI applications.

[Google Launches Gemini 3.1 Pro](#)

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our Google AI specialists to start discussing how Gemini can be included to meet specific requirements, especially in marketing departments.



Nova Lake Q4 2026?

Panther Lake is not yet even available for us ~~minions~~ ummm.. users to buy and we are now hearing news that we may see some versions of the NEXT generation of CPU's start releasing by the end of this year!!!

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our hardware specialists to help explore all

the different form factors and configurations of notebooks going forward. With the shortage and price increases starting to bite, I URGE you to be more flexible about which configurations and even brands you are willing to consider as your corporate standard.

Nova Lake Q4 2026

Nova Lake to challenge AMD

2026 is the Year for the AI PC

Microsoft is predictably promoting 2026 as the year you switch to AI PCs with all the unique features they offer.

One that I think could be exceptionally useful is natural language (semantic) search across everything that the "old" search used to do, often extremely painfully!

I find it odd that Microsoft is not promoting this feature, as for many, this alone could be a game-changer!

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our hardware specialists to assist with specifying these new PCs and determining use cases for some of their features.

Semantic Search with CoPilot+

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