



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

7th September #183

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: Safenames, Cybrary and Barracuda are added.**
- **DarkWeb Weekly Intelligence Report #183- SA has not escaped**
- **Did you Know? - First Technology is in the LEO Space business!!**
- **AMD Announces a Trillion Parameter beast** - for LOTS of \$\$\$\$\$\$
- **NVIDIA gives you shared GPU's for free** - clever way to get more AI
- **Microsoft updates MACC FAQ's** - best check the rules!
- **New Outlook gets more Features** - Microsoft not giving up!
- **Your old Exchange Server is almost dead** - time to say goodbye
- **Microsoft is not always to blame** - Device drivers can cause chaos
- **Hiding in Plain sight** - Hackers keep finding new ways to trick you
- **Astra GPT 6** - is this finally AGI? Maybe!

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Subscribe to Top Stories

**DarkWeb Executive
Report #183**

**Last Week's Top
Stories**

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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.**

[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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Safenames
Cybrary
Barracuda

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

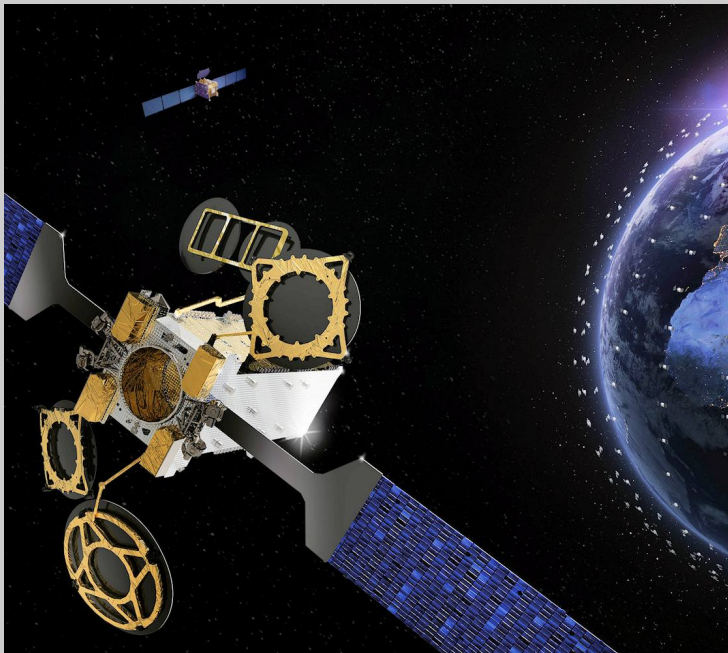
[New Movies for this week](#)

SpiderMan is still doing well. Dog Stars, even though it was a Ridley Scott movie, did not do so well, and Coyote vs ACME is doing very well.....

WARNING!! The trailer for Ice Cream Man is really hectic!!!

Did You Know?

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We have gone to space!

Low Earth Orbit satellite connectivity. Anywhere. Even where there is nothing.

Every business has that one site..... the depot, the mine, the lodge, the store in the middle of nowhere, where the fibre is never going to arrive, the LTE backup has not worked since the day it was installed, and the point of sale falls over every time the weather turns.

You have probably been

waiting for Starlink to solve it....

FirstNet decided not to wait.

First Technology Group, through FirstNet and in partnership with Q-KON, now delivers Low Earth Orbit satellite connectivity on the Eutelsat OneWeb constellation, plugged directly into the FirstNet core network.

This is not the VSAT you remember. Those geostationary satellites sit 36,000 km above your head, which is exactly why they were slow.

These new satellites sit at around 1,200 km. Low latency, high throughput, always on, handing your connection from one satellite to the next as they pass overhead.

And because we interconnect directly rather than reselling somebody else's package, we build the packages ourselves:

- **Primary business connectivity.** Uncapped, no fair usage policy, up to 100 Mbps.
- **Cost effective backup.** Priced on a data bundle or on throughput, and considerably cheaper than the LTE APN you are paying for now.
- **Pooled bandwidth.** As many sites as you like, sharing one allocation between all of them.

Where this changes things:

- Off grid sites with no fibre, no microwave and no cell signal. Mining, forestry, agriculture, lodges.
- Branch and store failover that actually fails over, point of sale included.
- Events, conferences and outside broadcast. Up in hours, gone a few days later.
- Vehicles and vessels in motion, using mobile terminals.
- Disaster recovery, for the day somebody puts a spade through your fibre route.
- Anywhere in Southern Africa, with Angola, the DRC and Zambia southwards on the network today.
- **FirstNet handles all of it.** Project management, logistics, certified installation teams, monitoring, support and SLA, with the capacity to deliver more than 250 new services a month.

And one more thing. If you are still waiting on hardware ordered months ago that now costs double what you budgeted (see TOP STORIES #180, #181 and #182), real connectivity to a remote site changes that conversation completely.

Ageing machines become endpoints into Windows 365 or a hosted environment in FirstNet's data centre, and the order you are still waiting for may not be needed at all.

So..... which of your sites is the one that always breaks?

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to arrange a connectivity review with the FirstNet team, and find out exactly where Low Earth Orbit satellite connectivity fits into your network.

Fibre where you can. **Satellite where you cannot.** One network, one partner.

AMD's \$100,000 Threadripper Halo 1 Trillion-parameter Beast

AMD has unveiled its Threadripper Halo Station, a liquid-cooled workstation designed to bring serious AI processing into the office. It combines a 96-core Threadripper PRO processor with up to 2TB of system RAM and planned configurations reaching 576GB of high-speed GPU memory. AMD describes it as a prototype, with availability planned for 2027. see the [AMD announcement](#) here.

The attraction is straightforward. Researchers and developers could run large AI models and continuously working agents locally, keeping sensitive data and intellectual property under their own control while reducing dependence on rented cloud capacity.



However, the US\$100,000 headline is an educated guess. AMD has NOT announced a price.

[The Register](#) estimates US\$100,000 to US\$150,000, depending on configuration. Apparently, “personal AI” now requires a rather personal conversation with the finance director!

The GPU-memory calculation assumes four

accelerators and models using reduced four-bit precision. Having enough memory to load a model does NOT establish how quickly it will answer, how many users it can serve, or whether the reduced precision delivers acceptable results.

This reinforces the recurring message in TOP STORIES, choose the right model and environment for the workload.

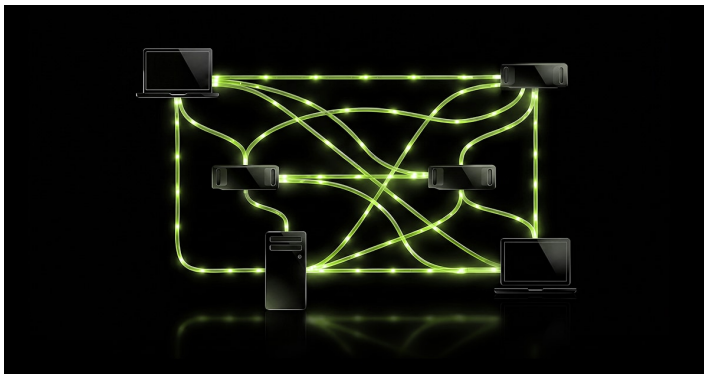
Local AI deserves serious consideration, particularly for sensitive data and sustained usage, but the business case must include software compatibility, electricity, cooling, security and ongoing support.

The cloud consumption meter may stop turning, but the electricity meter certainly won't!

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with their hardware, Cloud, AI and security specialists to benchmark your actual workloads and compare local, cloud and hybrid options before committing to a very expensive desk companion (that might take awhile to arrive).

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WebProNews: AMD's 1 Trillion parameter beast



Can't afford the \$100,000 AI workstation? NVIDIA has a Plan!

Following the AMD monster AI workstation covered

above, which is wonderful if you have around \$100,000 burning a hole in your IT budget, NVIDIA has announced something rather more interesting for us mere mortals.

NVIDIA PAIR, Personal AI Router, is free, open-source software that allows you to use the AI computing power already scattered around your home or office. It can connect compatible RTX PCs, workstations, DGX Spark systems and even Macs, then intelligently route local AI requests to whichever machine has capacity available. It currently supports RTX 20 Series GPUs and newer, Apple M4 or newer, with Ollama and LM Studio as the supported AI engines.

The clever bit is that your applications see a single local AI endpoint while PAIR decides which computer actually does the work. NVIDIA demonstrated a five-agent workload

taking 8 minutes 48 seconds across three machines, versus 18 minutes on one machine. Your collection of gaming PCs and workstations has suddenly acquired a potentially useful second career.

There is however an important catch that some of the coverage glosses over. PAIR does not combine the GPU memory in several computers into one enormous virtual GPU. A 24GB RTX card plus another 24GB RTX card does NOT magically give you a 48GB GPU capable of loading a bigger model. Each request still runs on one machine. Where PAIR becomes powerful is when several AI agents or users are making requests simultaneously, allowing those workloads to be spread across otherwise idle computers.

The other attraction is privacy.

Prompts, files and agent context can stay on the local network rather than being sent to a cloud inference service. It also works without an Internet connection once the models have been downloaded. PAIR is still in beta, and NVIDIA specifically cautions that the machines and network being paired should be trusted. Free software does not automatically mean free, secure compute, or free electricity!

This is another important step towards local AI becoming practical without buying a dedicated AI supercomputer. Before spending a fortune on new AI hardware, it may be worth discovering how much GPU capability is already hiding inside the PCs you own.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with their hardware, AI and security specialists to investigate whether existing RTX hardware could be repurposed for local AI workloads, and where dedicated AI workstations, PAIR, cloud AI, or a mixture of all three makes the most sense.

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NVIDIA Personal AI Router

Microsoft News

Microsoft updates it's Azure MACC FAQ's

Microsoft has updated its Azure FAQs, adding 12 new questions around the Microsoft Azure Consumption Commitment (MACC).

The changes explain how Azure Marketplace purchases count towards your commitment, what happens when purchases are refunded, how Azure Prepayment is treated, and what happens to eligible Marketplace purchases when moving from an EA to MCA-E.

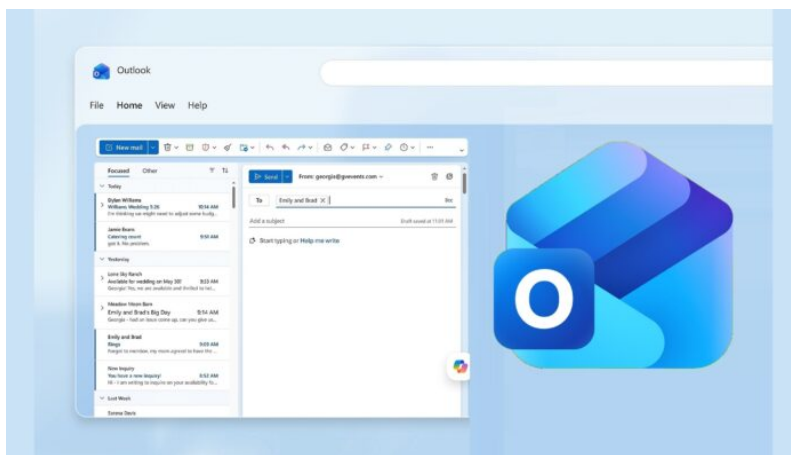
If you have a MACC, this is worth checking, as getting the rules wrong could mean spending money that does NOT reduce the commitment you have already made to Microsoft.

Microsoft updates these FAQs directly on its website, which makes keeping track of what has changed rather difficult. I make life a little easier by highlighting the important changes for you here.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with an Azure licensing specialist to help you understand how these changes affect your agreements and ensure you are getting the maximum value from your Azure commitment.

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FAQ about using your MACC in the Microsoft Marketplace



New Outlook gets 5 more features.

Long-time TOP STORIES readers know the story. Microsoft wants everybody on New Outlook, many users still prefer Classic Outlook, and Microsoft keeps

adding features until eventually resistance becomes futile!

- You can now delete up to 100 contacts at once, instead of the rather silly limit of 10.
- Quick Parts can be inserted directly from the right-click menu.
- Ctrl+Y brings back the familiar Go to Folder shortcut.
- Focused and Other inboxes now work offline.
- Message lists can display an additional information column when sorting or filtering.

The much-requested All Inboxes view is also rolling out, although not everybody has it yet.

More offline controls, bulk management of inbox rules and the ability to transfer ownership of meetings are also coming.

So yes, New Outlook IS getting better. That does not mean everybody suddenly loves it, or that every Classic Outlook workflow, integration and feature has magically appeared.

But Microsoft's direction remains unchanged. New Outlook is ultimately where everybody is heading, although existing Classic Outlook installations remain supported until at least 2029.

The message therefore remains exactly the same, don't panic and migrate tomorrow, but don't ignore it either. Keep testing New Outlook, identify add-ins, offline requirements, PST dependencies, integrations and power users, and keep updating the migration plan as Microsoft fills in the gaps.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with their Microsoft specialists to help assess your Outlook environment and develop a structured migration plan.

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WindowsLatest: New Outlook gets 5 more features

Microsoft to bounce mail from outdated Exchange servers

This REALLY should not be a surprise.

Starting in the second week of September, Microsoft is tightening the screws on old Exchange Server 2016 and 2019 installations connecting to Exchange Online. If the server sending mail through an On Premises inbound connector is not patched to at least Microsoft's final October 2025 public update baseline, Exchange Online can start throttling the mail and ultimately block it.

For now, this only applies to servers using the On Premises connector and not every possible way of sending mail to Exchange Online.

Microsoft rather ominously adds that this "might change in the future".

There is a bigger warning here. Exchange Server 2016 and 2019 have already been out of support since October 2025.

Microsoft says the NEXT increase in the minimum acceptable version, expected within several months, will require a version newer than anything publicly released for these products. At that point you will need to be enrolled in Extended Security Updates or have moved to Exchange Server Subscription Edition.

TOP STORIES readers have had plenty of warning. All the way back in TOP STORIES #4 in 2023 I warned that Microsoft was starting to block email from persistently vulnerable Exchange servers. TOP STORIES #75 warned again about Exchange 2016 reaching end of support, while #76 covered the arrival of Exchange Server Subscription Edition and specifically warned customers with ANY on-premise Exchange deployment, including hybrid, to have a migration roadmap. The Don't Forget section then repeatedly highlighted the October 2025 deadline.

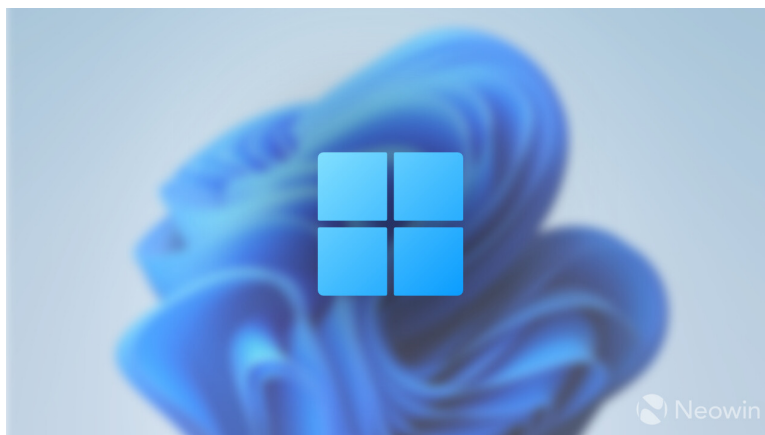
So this is not really news, it is Microsoft beginning to enforce what it has been warning about for years.

If there is still Exchange Server 2016 or 2019 anywhere in your environment, especially in a hybrid configuration, now would be a very good time to check exactly what version it is running.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with their Exchange specialists to check your patch level, ESU status and roadmap to Exchange Server SE or Exchange Online before "throttled" becomes "blocked".

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Microsoft to bounce mail from Outdated Exchange Servers



**It's not
ALWAYS
Microsoft's
fault!**

Windows stability problems are not always Microsoft's fault!

Microsoft has been tightening its Driver Quality Initiative,

because faulty or outdated drivers remain a major cause of crashes, black screens, sleep problems and other Windows instability.

The important point is that Windows Update saying you are up to date does NOT necessarily mean all your drivers, BIOS and firmware are current. OEM tools and proper endpoint management may still find important updates that Windows Update has missed.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with FTG's hardware and endpoint specialists, who can review your device estate, identify missing driver, BIOS and firmware updates, and help implement a controlled process to keep machines properly updated.

Microsoft Improving Driver Quality

Invisible Unicode

Hi

We'd like to share that [redacted] may qualify for financing through our **Business Credit Line** or **Bridge Funding** programs.

- 60-month terms
- 3-year options
- Competitive rates
- No prepayment fees

Two circular callouts show hex codes: `\u200B \u200C\u200E\u200F \u200A\u200B` and `\u200C \u200A\u200B`.

Two new phishing techniques demonstrate just how creative attackers are becoming at getting around email security.

The second is even sneakier. Attackers are inserting invisible Unicode characters into words such as "funding". Humans see the word normally, but some filtering systems see something completely different.

Different tricks, same objective, make the email look normal to you while confusing the technology trying to protect you.

This is why security awareness cannot be an annual tick-box exercise. Training needs to be regular, targeted and continuously updated to reflect the techniques actually being used by attackers today.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with FTG's security specialists to review your Microsoft 365 email security controls and, importantly, implement continuous targeted security awareness training.

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Cloud & AI



OpenAI Releases GPT 6 "Astra"

OpenAI's new GPT-6 Astra is a substantial step forward, particularly for businesses. It can operate software

more directly, update CRM systems, work inside Excel and Power BI, and tackle complex multi-step tasks. Its new "recurrent depth" reasoning can repeatedly reconsider a problem before acting, potentially making it much better at difficult work.

But more intelligent also means more autonomous, and potentially more difficult to understand. OpenAI itself acknowledges that monitoring Astra's reasoning is harder, while security experts are questioning how comfortable businesses should be handing increasingly powerful AI agents access to critical systems.

This reinforces a consistent TOP STORIES theme..... AI must be fit for purpose.

Astra may be brilliant for some workloads, but that does not mean you should move everything to it.

NVIDIA PAIR now allows organisations to utilise existing local AI hardware while keeping prompts, files and context on the local network, while increasingly powerful AI workstations provide another option for workloads requiring greater privacy, sovereignty or predictable costs.

The future is therefore probably hybrid AI..... cloud models like Astra where their enormous capability adds value, sovereign platforms where data location matters, and local AI where keeping the data on-premises makes more sense.

Going "all in" on Astra may sound exciting..... going all in on any single AI architecture deserves considerably more thought.... about risks....

As AI approaches real AGI, finding yourself shut off or shut out could become increasingly possible.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with FTG's AI specialists to help determine which AI architecture, cloud, sovereign, hybrid or on-premises, is actually appropriate for each workload.

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Astra lays a New Foundation

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