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2nd February #152

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.
 - **Microsoft EoL section** Updated for January 2027 - **Note the Biztalk Zombie!**
 - **3 New vendors** mimecast, Druva & Snowflake added to FirstMarketplace
 - **Jacky the Robot Steals the Show** - The Microsoft AI Tour with a robot!
 - **SharePoint and OneDrive online retirement** - start making plans.
 - **Microsoft to improve Win 11** - Says it wants to make its 1 billion users happy
 - **Microsoft Delays Sentinel Migration** - Defender Portal is the future.
 - **Teams Licensing updated** - Features for everybody that were once in Premium
 - **Microsoft says there 15 million CoPilot users**- Do they actually use it?
 - **Phishing is not the biggest attack vector** - Beware of hybrid attacks!
 - **Don't be a sitting Duck** - Patch your WinRAR installations.
 - **Getting Phished in a legit. email thread** - You could be caught out mid-chat!
 - **CoPilot gets a better memory** - starting to be like ChatGPT - will help in Excel.
 - **Panther Lake Delivers** - It's early days, but reviews are starting to Leak.
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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.

Panther Lake Wins

DRAM prices have already tripled.

Read how Intel's Panther Lake changes the game now that CES is done.

TOP STORIES #151

Click button above for last weeks news.

Price increases hit SA IT Hard

Visit FirstMarketPLace

mimecast, Snowflake and Druiva have been added for this week.

There is now a LinkedIn Page for you to follow as well.

Movie releases

Get all the releases for the next 4 weeks in South Africa.

Coming up: "Send Help"
Next big movie for 2026 is **"Hail Mary"**.

Upcoming Shows

Review what happened at CES and see links for NAMM 2026 if you into Pro AV, and then of course you cannot miss the big show of the ProAV industry - **ISE 3-6 of Feb in Barcelona.**

Visit our LinkedIn

Request Account Manager

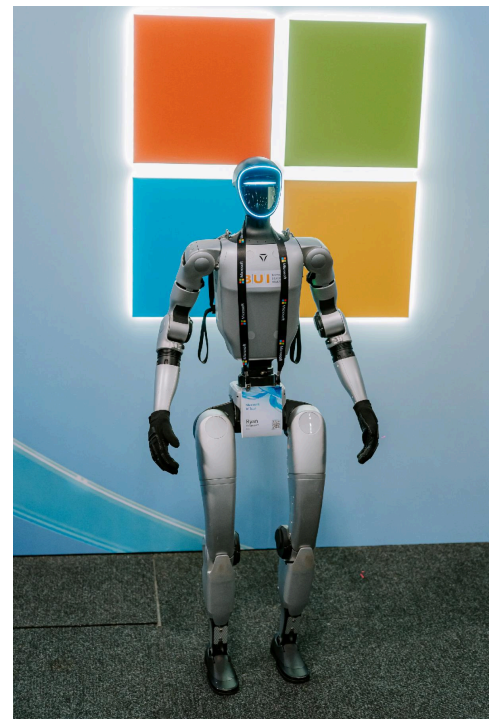
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Jacky, the AI Robot Steals the Show!

Microsoft held its AI tour event in Johannesburg on the 29th of January, where BUI, part of First Technology Group, showcased the G1 Humanoid Robot to support discussions on AI and its role in supporting productivity and IT security in companies.

BUI was at the show alongside other FTG Divisions, including GaldonData, First Digital, FirstNet and CRMTeam.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our AI specialists in all the different fields such as security, data, CRM, Unified Communications etc... and to maybe meet the robot!



Microsoft AI Tour and the Robot!

Jacky the Robot

Microsoft News This Week

SharePoint and OneDrive online plan retirement

Microsoft has announced the retirement schedule for standalone SharePoint Online and OneDrive (formerly "OneDrive for Business") plans. Whilst the services remain available in eligible Microsoft 365 suites, new standalone purchases will no longer be permitted after 31 May, 2026.

Renewals will still be available until January 2027, after which they'll remain on existing contracts until the full retirement date in December 2029.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our specialists to help plan your transition if you are affected.

SharePoint and OneDrive Online announcement

Microsoft Recalibrates Windows 11 and AI

Microsoft appears to have acknowledged that not all has been going well for the operating system, even though there are now over 1 billion users. Trust has eroded, and it seems Microsoft is acknowledging this with a review of how hard it continues to push AI into every corner of the operating system, along with increasing instability issues emanating from every "Patch Tuesday". Hopefully, we will see Microsoft pivot back to delivering an efficient, stable operating system that maximises performance with less RAM than we might have preferred due to price increases.

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our Windows 11 Specialists to help you get every bit of performance and stability out of your operating system from today as with memory and storage prices going crazy you need to get every bit of performance out of what you already have while we also prepare to evaluate and then deploy any improvements that Microsoft is promising to make.

Microsoft Sentinel customers have more time for Migration

Microsoft has announced that users of its cloud-based SIEM solution now have until March 2027 to migrate to the Defender portal. There are numerous capabilities that exist only on the Defender portal, so customers have lots of incentives to migrate.

Please contact your First Technology Group Account manager to connect you with our Microsoft Sentinel specialists to assist with this Migration or even evaluate Sentinel as your SIEM solution.

Migrating Sentinel to Defender

Changes coming to Teams Licensing 1 April 2026





Microsoft has posted on the official Teams Blog site some major changes coming to Teams licensing starting 1st April 2026.

- **Advanced Town Hall & Webinar features (streaming chat, reactions, eCDN, immersive 3D events), previously in Teams Premium, for up to 3,000 interactive / 10,000 view-only attendees.**
- Need bigger events? New Attendee Capacity Packs will scale up to 100,000. Pricing TBA.
- Places end-user features (Places Finder, Places Explorer), previously in Teams Premium, are now available for all users with Exchange/M365, except licensees.
- Teams Shared Devices license will be renamed to Teams Shared Space license, which adds the ability to manage up to four desks with a single license, as well as the original shared device features. This is the way you would make spaces and desks available to Microsoft Places users.
- **Teams Premium is still needed for advanced communication features** in Teams meetings, meeting protection, Advanced Collaboration Tools for admins, Intelligent recap, Queues app for Teams Phone, and enhanced capabilities for Bookings and virtual appointments.

Tom's m365perspective.com has also created a nice infographic summarising the changes below.....

Microsoft Teams Licensing Changes April 1st 2026



Places End-User Features	Teams Shared Space License	Advanced Town Hall & Webinar Features	Attendee Pack Licenses
 Places end-user functionality moves from Teams Premium to Teams Enterprise licenses	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Renamed from Teams Shared Device licenseManage up to four spaces/desks with a single licenseEnables Desk booking for employeesAllows Space management of booking policiesProvides Space Analytics like desk utilization reportsIntegrates with 3rd-party APIs for check-in signals and spatial data	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Features previously in Teams Premium move to Teams Core licensesIncludes advanced host controls and managementSupports up to 3,000 interactive attendeesAllows up to 10,000 attendees in view-only experience	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">New add-on licenses to increase attendee capScale events up to 100,000 participantsAvailable in a range of sizes for added flexibility

Please contact your First Technology Group Account manager to connect you with our Teams experts to assist you in evaluating these new benefits coming to Teams and how that may change the value proposition for you in putting Teams to better use in your organisation.

Teams Premium features coming to Teams Core

Microsoft Claims 15 Million Paid M365 CoPilot Seats

Directions on Microsoft has published a summary of the highlights of their H1 results. One of the interesting numbers they published for the first time is the number of CoPilot seats, which accounts for 3.3% of the M365/O365 user base. It seems that Office is not proving to be the advantage Microsoft was hoping for, as OpenAI has also doubled the number of paid seats with only AI as the offering.

HOWEVER, for a company it is important to still prioritise working with CoPilot as Microsoft is the only company that is able to provide access to an AI while ensuring that the necessary security guardrails are in place.

CoPilot is improving alongside Microsoft's "Agentic" agenda, and we need to start worrying about how these agents will be billed.

You cannot do any of this without ensuring you have properly identified and secured access to the data that you want the AI to access.

Please contact your First Technology Group Account Manager to connect you with our CoPilot and security specialists to begin planning your AI adoption.

Microsoft H1 Earnings call

Security

Threat Exploitation overtaking Phishing as attack Vector

This is a very interesting article to take note of, but it is very important to note that exploiting Vulnerabilities ALONG with Phishing will lead to exceptionally dangerous attacks that may take longer to detect and inevitably be FAR more damaging than anything you can imagine,



especially when assisted by a malevolent AI! It is SO important to realise that in the bigger picture, one type of attack does not overtake another, but in actual fact combines all of these vectors into new ways of getting deeper access for longer. Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our training partners to ensure that your users are always being kept up to date with the latest tricks to grant access or to enter their credentials when they are not actually needed!

Vulnerability Exploitation overtakes Phishing

Please Patch your WinRAR!

This vulnerability has long since been patched, but unfortunately it is still being exploited. WinRAR is one of those apps you are not supposed to have installed in your corporate environment, but there are always some copies hiding away in dark corners of your network as you are ALSO probably unlicensed and potentially exposed to an audit as well - WinRAR can become bad news on two fronts!

Remember, support for WinRAR in Windows 11 is limited to extraction only, so there is a very good chance you DO have copies hiding on some of your users PC's.

This serves as a reminder that it is a very good idea to regularly collect and check an inventory of ALL software on all your devices.

Combine this, with all the other ways you are getting attacked, this is a bigger risk than what you may think!

If you have copies of WinRAR in your environment older than 7.xx you are potentially in very big trouble - you just need ONE instance to get attacked.

A managed SAM service helps detect and warn about anomalies, as these need to be detected and flagged as a licensing risk as well.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you our SAM specialists that can assist you with such a process.

WinRAR under Attack

Threat Actors use Real Enterprise Email to Deliver Phishing Links

The bad guys have come up with a new phishing trick where they hijacked a legitimate email thread to deliver a phishing link. This is an example where attacks do not start out "cold", but instead hijack existing, real communications to insert a phishing link.

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our training partners, ensure your users are kept up to date with the latest techniques for credential entry, and review approval processes where possible to separate initiators, processors, and approvers (4-eyes principle).

Hijacking Real Email Threads

Cloud & AI

CoPilot's memory to behave more like ChatGPT

Microsoft is catching up by getting an advanced memory management feature. CoPilot's memory is getting smarter and more persistent, and most importantly, does all this inside a secure ecosystem. Advanced memory is rolling out in waves, starting in the USA.

CoPilot gets Persistent Memory

AI fixes Formulas in Excel

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our AI specialists to start working on how you get CoPilot deployed in your environment, even if it only for a few to start experimenting with. Excel is a great place for AI to be very useful, and Microsoft is adding features all the time.



Panther Lake Delivers

What is starting to become clear is that Panther Lake is delivering performance similar to what was promised at CES 2026.

A review of the Lenovo and the Intel Core Ultra X9 has been posted, and the results are positive.

Of course these CPU's will have to contend with AMD's Ryzen AI 400 CPU's which are also giving really good results

and will probably compete well on price.

You may also notice the minimum RAM configuration for the Lenovo is 32Gig.

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our hardware specialists to explore different options for your users and help save on costs, combat rising prices and shortages.

When your usual notebooks are out of stock, maybe other form factors and even those with AMD CPU's will need more serious consideration!

Lenovo Ideapad 5 Pro Review

Lenovo Yoga mini i

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