

TOP STORIES #138

Welcome to TOP STORIES, which has been published for more than 22 years!

It has now been more than 2 years since we have been publishing weekly.

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.

New this week

- Upcoming shows [have their own page](#)
- **Office Online Server** is EOL December 2026 (see "[Don't Forget](#)")
- Your **HDMI cable** can be killing your WiFi!
- **CoPilot Chat** available for M365 Free!!
- Microsoft launches **CoPilot Licensing Diagnostics** (????).
- **Massive Global SMS phishing attack** underway
- **Microsoft Launches AI browser** to compete with Atlas
- **PluralSight and Articulate** added to First Marketplace
- BUI [Video Blog #12](#) with **what's new in Security** for September - Blast Radius?

Reminder that you can access [TOP STORIES AI \("TSAI"\)](#) to search for anything in the archive. You can read more about TSAI in [TOP STORIES #108](#).

If you have not tried TSAI yet, I recommend that you do, as it is getting cleverer and faster! You will need an MS ID to sign in, and if you are using your corporate ID, this might require organisational permission.

Check out the **official movie release** dates in South Africa for all studios at the bottom of this email.

The schedule provides you with releases four weeks in advance. It is accurate!

I believe this is the only independent source in South Africa where you can find a comprehensive list of all the upcoming movies.

Last week's [TOP STORIES #137 is here](#)

If you would like to invite other colleagues to join this newsletter (even if it is just for the movie release dates), they can [click here](#).

If you do not want to continue receiving TOP STORIES, click on the unsubscribe link at the bottom of the mail.

Upcoming Shows

- **AWS re:Invent 2025 - 1-5 December Las Vegas**
- **CES 2026 6-9 Jan 2026 Las Vegas**
- **NAMM 20-24 Jan 2026 Anaheim**
- **NAB April 18-22 Las Vegas**

[You can read more about the shows here](#).

Don't Forget

Windows 10, Exchange 2016/9 and Office 2016/9 are Now EOL

.....and others as well

Office Online Server also comes to the end of support on 31 December 2026

This is a BIG problem for some companies that have depended on Office Online Server to keep operations in-house ([read more here](#))- moving to the cloud will be challenging!

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our Server and M365 specialists to start reviewing your options.

You can buy M365 with or without Teams - full story [from Microsoft is here](#)

License Enforcement for Dynamics 365 ERP rules have changed again (see below)

We all know about the end of Windows 10, which has been documented repeatedly in TOP STORIES over the past year, but there are also changes that have been missed along with new updates, all summarised in the "Don't Forget changes August 2025-2026 complete" document, [which you can download here](#).

Here are a few changes you should pay attention to:

- **The end of trust-based licensing for Dynamics is explained on Page 11**
- Note the retirement of the Azure AD Graph API 31 August on **Page 7**
- CoPilot Feature enhancements for August 2025 **Page 4**
- Azure Services being retired are updated on **Page 7**
- Windows Server 2022 ends mainstream support in October 2026 **Page 16**
- The end of Windows 10 has implications for Office, summarised on **Page 10**

Hardware

Your HDMI cable could be killing your WiFi

This problem is getting worse! Up to now, RF Interference is something the Audio Industry has known about for decades and is well aware of how to deal with the problem (expensive cables, like snake oil, are NOT always the solution) - [here is a great video from Dave Rat](#) that explains how audio is affected and how to deal with it showing that expensive cables are not always what they pretend to be.

When it comes to WiFi, the transmission frequencies are much higher than audio, and now with so many devices fighting for a piece of the spectrum in your home or office, interference is a REAL problem, so much so that even your HDMI cable (unshielded), can knock out your WiFi - as you can [read in this article here](#) (enable translation).

Most spaces are highly congested—classrooms, entertainment venues, and packed open-plan offices. Add a microwave to all this, and you will be surprised to see that connections stutter, and many Bluetooth devices stop altogether.

Surprisingly, a coiled-up HDMI cable lying innocently behind your screen can behave like a WiFi Jammer!

NOTE!!!!..... If your WiFi or Bluetooth is misbehaving, don't immediately blame the ISP, IT Department or gremlins in the cloud. Take a look at your cables and gadgets.

That nest of coiled HDMI cords behind your monitor?

It might be silently choking your signal. Avoid tightly coiling excess cable length (loops can amplify interference), and invest in quality shielded cables for your displays and peripherals. Also, keep noise sources (like microwaves or even unshielded USB 3 hubs) a good distance away from your wireless gear.

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our hardware specialists – we can help identify sneaky interference sources and recommend the right cable upgrades or layout tweaks to keep your wireless network stable.

Densely packed buildings can be particularly challenging and require careful design and planning to ensure your users receive consistent WiFi coverage and sources of interference are isolated.

Microsoft

Microsoft 365 Apps and CoPilot Chat (Free)

Microsoft Copilot has evolved into Microsoft 365 Copilot Chat, with new features landing all the time. It's a bundle of AI capabilities, the latest being chat inside the Microsoft 365 apps. If you have a valid Microsoft 365 or Office 365 licence, you'll see a context-aware sidebar in your apps that offers natural-language help based on the document you've opened.

No separate Microsoft 365 Copilot licence needed!

You can see the [Microsoft announcement here](#), and [how you are eligible for the licenses here](#).

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our AI and M365 specialists to help you get this CoPilot service switched on.

CoPilot License diagnostics

This tool, released in August, helps you verify whether your users are properly licensed for the CoPilot components they use.

You can [find the diagnostic tool here](#).

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our Licensing and CoPilot specialists, who can help you run this tool and then ensure you end up with the most optimal licensing structures that you actually need.

W365 Promotion extended to 30 April 2026

Microsoft has decided to prolong the promotion offering a 20% discount on W365 which ties in with the ability to get ESU for Windows 10 in W365.

You can [read about the promotion from Microsoft here](#).

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our Windows, Azure and licensing specialists to help evaluate if you are able to take advantage of this offer.

M365 CoPilot offerings for Education

Microsoft is introducing a Microsoft 365 Copilot plan for education in **December 2025 at \$18 per user per month**, versus \$30 for commercial. It includes natural-language chat, deep integration across the Microsoft 365 apps, reasoning over your institutional data, and access to custom and pre-built Agents grounded in your tenant.

Two no-cost Agents are also rolling out in the coming weeks to education customers...

Teach for educators to build lesson plans and classroom materials, and **Study and Learn** for students to create adaptive practice and study activities.

Copilot Chat is now in apps like Outlook and PowerPoint, with LMS access (Canvas, Schoology, Brightspace, Blackboard, Moodle) coming in December via LTI (Learning Tools Interoperability).

You can read [more about this announcement from Microsoft here](#).

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our experts in Education licensing to help ensure you get the most benefit from this Microsoft announcement.

Azure SRE Agent is the first to use AAU billing.

Azure SRE Agent streamlines incident response, boosts uptime, and lowers operational costs so (human) Site Reliability Engineers can focus on higher-value work.

From a licensing point of view, it is notable that this is the first Azure-hosted autonomous agent billed on a new meter: Azure Agent Units (AAUs).

Background monitoring is charged at 4 AAUs per hour. When the agent engages on a task, billing is 0.25 AAU per second for the duration of the action.

The Article from [Microsoft explaining this new billing model can be found here](#).

A YouTube video from Microsoft [explaining what this agent does is here](#).

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our Azure experts to help assess the value of getting the Agent deployed for your business.

Security

New Text Message-Based Phishing Attack targeting users Globally

Be SUPER careful of SMS's - especially with URLs in them - DO NOT CLICK unless you are 100% sure you are expecting the SMS!

A large text-message phishing campaign, attributed to the Smishing Triad, is hitting users in 121+ countries. Researchers tracked 194,345 phishing domains across 136,933 roots since January 2024, with rapid domain churn (most live under a week).

Messages spoof banks, e-commerce, healthcare, law enforcement, courier companies and government, now sent from regular phone numbers (often +63 or +1) rather than email-to-SMS. Infrastructure is registered via a Hong Kong registrar with Chinese nameservers, while hosting concentrates on U.S. cloud IPs behind Cloudflare. You can [read more about this global attack here](#).

Please ensure your users are warned to ignore “toll/parcel/overdue fine” texts and to verify in official apps only.

This is yet another reminder that you should contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our specialist partners, who are experts in helping you train your users to stay alert to these attacks. Unfortunately, it seems we have to approach all communication with ZERO trust!

Phishing attacks continue to get more sophisticated

It is scary to think that we are only at the beginning of the trend where the bad guys use AI to make their attacks increasingly credible, tricking you into allowing them access. QR codes are getting embedded in "legitimate" PDF documents and encouraging you to scan them with your mobile device and many other tricks... you can [read more about these evolving attacks here](#). Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our security specialists and training partners to help take the necessary measures to keep improving security.

Cloud & AI

Microsoft launches AI browser to compete with OpenAI Atlas

Microsoft's CoPilot in Edge will be able to see your tabs, compare information and even complete forms. Both are very similar, and the Microsoft one is available on Windows right now.

You can [read about these two browsers here](#).

CoPilot is catching up with all the other AI vendors and is leading when it comes to integration and security, so it is very important that you take steps to start experimenting with it in your business to see how AI can start helping your business run more efficiently.

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our AI and security specialists to help start the journey of implementing AI in your business.

What's up at FTG

FirstMarketplace.com adding Products Weekly

Companies spend on average more than \$4500 per employee per year on SaaS.

You can be efficient and spend less!

Added this week for #138: PluralSight and more -[read here](#) for the complete list of additions for this week and who to contact for support.

Check with your account manager to see if you can get a better deal!

We are adding new products every day - [check with us](#) before you procure ANYTHING!

- **SIX routes to market** (Azure, AWS, Huawei, private offers, local aggregation and more) – utilising a central catalogue.
- **Procurement in any Geo**, in any currency.
- **For South Africa, Rand-based invoicing**, BEE credits.
- **Zero credit card drama** means finance signs off in minutes, not months.
- **Always-on price intelligence** auto checks your existing cloud commitments and applies the best deal – we'll even work to beat your current quote.
- **Hard to find title sourcing specialists** hunt them down to your exact requirements while you get on with what's really important in your day.

Why wrestle with the how, where and when of software procurement, when **First Marketplace does it all?**

Book a 5-minute meeting with your [First Technology Group Account Manager](#) and watch "advanced" procurement become effortless.

Cloud costing you more than expected?

First Technology Group is stepping up your cloud financial management game with Umbrella (formerly Anodot Cost) — our preferred platform for FinOps and Cloud Cost Management. Umbrella unlocks faster innovation, deeper insights, and robust cost optimisation, empowering you to proactively manage your cloud spend and enhance financial efficiency.

As a Platinum preferred partner across Africa, FTG brings you unmatched expertise and tailored support, ensuring a smooth integration of Umbrella into your current systems with minimal operational disruption.

Here's what [Umbrella](#) means:

- **Enhanced Cost Management:** Full visibility of your cloud expenses to pinpoint savings.
- **Improved Financial Efficiency:** Powerful analytics to guide smarter cloud investments.
- **Seamless Integration:** Effortlessly combines with your existing infrastructure.

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect with our SAM or FinOps teams to see how they can help you optimise your cloud costs. Even if you may think you have your costs under control, there is no harm in asking somebody else to take a look.... just in case!

The END of all free Microsoft Support

Microsoft has ended free technical support for Azure.

The only free support you now get is for billing and subscription issues.

Microsoft now charges **\$650** per support incident - **NB! Not a typo!!**

BUI, FTG's Cloud and Security division has introduced a new support model that mitigates some of this impact - you can [read more and sign up for more information here](#) .

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to discuss your support requirements, as First Technology group can provide [GLOBAL SUPPORT 24/7/365](#) for a wide range of vendors, **including Microsoft**.

New Asset Visibility Assessment Available

The most certified SAM team in the country has announced a new service, which every company should be interested in, even if it is to validate inventories that you already have.

- **One scan**, full picture of every on-prem, cloud, HW & SW asset
- **Block64 tech** → shows what's installed, licensed and actually used
- **Pin-point over/under-licensing** & the real cloud cost drivers
- **Built-in FinOps** actions to kill idle spend, right-size, reserve & save
- **Results land in a single Power BI dashboard**

You can also contact the SAM division to participate in a 7-10-day PoC with First Intel and apply Real World FinOps practices.

Please contact your [First Technology Group account manager](#) to connect you with our SAM specialists to see how their service can best be applied to the challenges in your business, to gain insight into all assets.

BUI blog - Microsoft Security News for September

FTG's Cloud and Security Division, BUI's Video Blog, has posted a summary of Microsoft's security updates, including **Blast Radius analysis**

You can [watch Video #12 here](#) .

Please contact your First Technology Group account manager to connect you with our security specialists. They will help you understand how the new Microsoft announcements may impact your environment and determine if any additional licensing requirements apply.

Movies

The next big release is Predator: Badlands. Judging from the trailers, it seems that having a plot is optional!

Now Playing: [Springsteen: Deliver me from Nowhere](#)

Now Playing: [Stitch Head](#)

Now Playing: [Wicked Part One](#) Sing-Along edition (Lyrics on Screen)

Now Playing: [Roofman](#)

Now Playing: [Shelby Oaks](#)

31 October: [Chainsaw Man: The movie](#)

31 October: [Bugonia](#)

31 October: [Regretting you](#)

31 October: [Time Hoppers](#)

7 November: [Predator: Badlands](#)

7 November: [I wish you all the best](#)

14 November: [Coyotes](#)

14 November: [Paw Patrol Holiday Special](#)

14 November: [The Running Man](#)

14 November: [Now you see me: Now you Don't](#)

21 November: [Jujutsu Kaizen: Execution](#)

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