

## TOP STORIES #104

Welcome to TOP STORIES, which has been published for more than 22 years! As a user of Microsoft technologies, you're receiving this publication to stay informed about critical topics such as Microsoft licensing, end-of-life dates, technical updates, security notices, and more. I recommend you scan through "**Don't Forget**" below to see if you may have missed something coming to End of Support (EoS) that may impact your business.

**Remember to check out the official movie release dates in South Africa for all studios at the end of this email.** The schedule has been updated to provide you with releases four weeks in advance. It is accurate!

Last week's [TOP STORIES #103 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 right at the bottom of the mail.

[Mobile World Congress \(MWC\)](#) will take place in Barcelona starting Monday. This is a significant event for the mobile connectivity industry, focusing on 5G, 6G, AI, and the Internet of Things. [Here is a YouTube video](#) that gives a hint at the cool tech to expect. Satellite technology in mobile phones is going to get interesting!

[NAB](#), the Show for the Entertainment & Education Business and Movie Technology geeks, kicks off in Las Vegas from 5-9 April. AI is going to play a very big role at the show.

## Account Manager?

Not sure who is your account manager? [Click here for us to help sort that out!](#)

## Did you Know?

**You can now interrogate "TSAI" (Top Stories AI)!**

The website for the AI is here: <https://ai.firsttech.news/>

**Please contact your First Technology account manager for your username and password to get access while we are in Beta if you would like to volunteer to be a tester. It is excellent practice for when something like this is deployed on YOUR company's data!**

This site is still in its beta testing phase, and I would love feedback as we continue training the AI.

**This is an example of what can be done with an extensive database of information you would like your employees and/or customers to query for your business.**

You can ask it questions like:

- "When is Microsoft no longer supporting Outlook Classic?"
- "List the things the New Outlook does not support but is still available in Classic?"
- "What different applications and technologies of voice isolation are available?"
- "Find the latest M365 Plan comparison"
- "Missed TOP STORIES #102"

## Hardware

**AMD Launches GPU's to Compete with NVIDIA**

AMD has announced the RX 9070 series cards that are set to compete with NVIDIA in the 4070 category, and it looks like they will deliver. AMD has managed to launch its cards without much controversy and seems to have priced them just right. It looks like NVIDIA has a serious alternative for mid-range gaming. [Read more here](#).

## Microsoft updates the list of supported CPU's again for Windows 11

Microsoft has acknowledged that the list they published in February was incorrect and that 8th to 10th-generation CPUs ARE actually supported, and has further added some AMD Ryzen 8000 CPUs as well. You [can read more here](#).

Please contact your First Technology account manager, who will connect you with our hardware specialists to confirm the models deployed in your company can be upgraded to Windows 11 from HP, Dell, and Lenovo. Windows 10 will be out of support by October, so we must upgrade to Windows 11. The clock is ticking!

## World Hearing Day - Are you hearing but not LISTENING?

This is not the same as the selective hearing problem many teenagers "suffer" from! Hearing loss is becoming a serious problem with the younger generation wearing headsets and listening to all sorts of content at high volume levels for extended periods. It is an opportunity this Monday to [remind young people to keep the volume of what they are listening to down](#), to take breaks, and additionally to avoid using noise-cancelling headphones for extended periods, even at low volume levels.

### Hearing damage is permanent!

Even using noise-cancelling headphones for extended periods can lead to possible hearing impairment, making your brain "lazy" by not having to use its own built-in noise reduction capability - resulting in a disorder called CAPD (Central Auditory Processing Disorder). It is early days, but it is starting to look like there is a connection. You can [read more about this here](#) and another [article here](#).

This is an increasing problem where somebody can HEAR, but cannot **process** the audio. These problems eventually manifest in a company's meeting rooms and boardrooms, where people increasingly struggle to comprehend what is being said. In classrooms, this is even more of a problem, but that is outside the scope of this discussion.

It is more important than ever to ensure that your meeting rooms are well-designed, naturally quiet, and able to effectively pick up speech so the other party can hear you clearly and you can hear clearly the remote party from good speakers and at user's desks, they are issued with good quality headphones that do not permit excessive volume levels. First Technology Group has multiple teams that design and configure meeting rooms with high-quality Acoustic treatment, Microphones, and speakers.

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our Teams and Zoom experts to see how they can improve existing rooms and install brand-new ones with all these issues in mind.

## Microsoft

### Outlook Classic dropped from M365

It appears that only the "New Outlook" is being included in new M365 installations going forward, even though there is no official announcement. Fortunately, you can still download the "Classic Outlook," as the "New Outlook" is still incomplete and lacks many features that more advanced users will need.

It seems that only Consumers, Business Standard and Premium, are being affected for now, but this is a good reminder that Microsoft is determined to retire the "Classic Outlook" as **Enterprise is scheduled for transition in April 2026**. [Read more here](#) to find out how to download Outlook Classic separately.

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our experts to start planning this migration and to understand the implications, as one of the key features of the Classic Outlook that will NEVER be included in the New Outlook is the support for COM Add-ins. I have been warning about this since [TOP STORIES #52](#), but this is now getting serious as the deadline is approaching!

### No reactivation fee for Archived Sharepoint sites

Microsoft will begin removing reactivation fees starting in March. This is very handy as an old site sitting in an archive cannot be accessed by CoPilot.

### Archived OneDrive accounts are excluded from this concession.

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

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our Sharepoint Experts to help you understand how you can take advantage of this change, especially when it comes to deploying CoPilot

## Security

## How to defend against a Password Hack

For most of us, passwords play a very important role in our lives, and thus, it is good to know how our passwords can get cracked. Here is a [simple article](#) that explains the tools used and what to do to reduce the chances of being hacked.

## Hackers Bypassing Outlook Spam Filter

Attackers are exploiting hyperlink obfuscation to disguise malicious URLs under innocuous-looking text. Usually, Outlook would spot this and relegate the email to the Junk folder, but because the malicious link is hidden, Outlook does nothing. You can [read more here](#).

**To mitigate this, it is essential that you have additional scanning measures in place and that employees are trained to hover over a link to see the real URL before clicking on it.**

Please contact your First Technology Account manager to connect you with our experts to help check that the necessary measures are in place and to ensure that your user awareness training is up to date.

## Cloud & AI

### Using AI to change accents in real-time

Continually improving processing capability with increased transfer rates at lower latency has now allowed a startup to start implementing the ability to change an agent's accent in real-time while preserving the emotional content and removing background noise. [You can read more here](#). (There is already very advanced technology in Teams called "Voice Isolation"—see [TOP STORIES #103](#).) It is early days, but this technology will probably become generally available in most call centre solutions within the next year. Real-time translation at scale will probably follow soon after.

### Anthropic announces Claude Sonnet 3.7

This is one of the [new generations of AIs](#) like Grok 3 that have been trained on computing power that is magnitudes more powerful than ChatGPT 4. The race to AGI is not slowing, though OpenAI's release of GPT 4.5 [has been disappointing](#). However, it looks like the scaling law still applies when factoring in thinking time, which you can [read about in detail here](#).

It remains essential that you continue to prepare your environment for AI, to make sure that your data is secured and that the AI only has access to the data you want it to have. It is so important to start experimenting so you are not left behind.

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our experts to show you what we have already deployed in production and what we are working on, such as TOP STORIES AI

## Don't Forget

This new section is dedicated to reminding you about important dates or events in IT. Note that this list is not complete.

### The Microsoft Product Lifecycle Page

[Here is where you can find out when ANY product is ending](#) mainstream or extended support.

Of course, the list of products is huge, and it's easy to miss important dates and their implications. Even though you can access the list yourself, I'll highlight important dates.....

### Microsoft Office

There is a long list of Office EOL dates, including when Publisher will be discontinued (13 October 2026), Outlook "Classic" EOL (at least 2029), and more.

**Outlook Classic for Enterprise switches to "Opt-in" April 2026 (removed from Office install)**

The [complete list of Office EoS is maintained here](#).

It is important to remember that Office 2019/6 and Exchange Server 2016/9 Extended support, along with Windows 10, will end on 14 October 2025.

### Unlicensed OneDrive accounts to lose data

As advised in [TOP STORIES #95](#), as of now, OneDrive accounts will be archived after 93 days.

After another 93 days, they get PERMANENTLY deleted. Up until then, you can still re-activate the accounts. You can [read about how all this is working here](#). **THE FINAL DEADLINE (for a price) is before 29 July 2025!**

(disclaimer - Microsoft can change the rules anytime - so get your data out FAST!!!)

### **Windows 10 - End of Support (EoS) October 2025**

Everyone should be aware of this, but it is important to remember that Extended Support is available if you cannot get rid of Windows 10 in time, albeit very expensive.

It will only protect you from vulnerabilities Microsoft chooses to protect you from. You can get more information on [the program here](#).

Plan "C" will come from a company called [Opatch](#), but we have no technical expertise with this company's offering to assist.

**NOTE!!!!!! ALL support for any product, INCLUDING O365 running on Windows 10, also ends.**

**The exception - Windows 10 LTSC 2019 is supported till 2029.**

**Note the use case for LTSC is very narrow (POS, Medical Devices, ATM's etc.) and not recommended for general use.**

### **Windows 11 - End of Support (EoS)**

It is essential to track the builds, and as you can see, it is very important to make sure you are trying to deploy Win 11 24H2 and NOT earlier builds.....

Win 11 22H2 October 2025

Win 11 23H2 November 2026

**Win 11 24H2 October 2027**

Win 11 Ent. LTSC 2029

### **Windows Server End of Support**

Windows Server 2012 ESU ends October 2026 - **that's 100% the end of the line.**

**Windows Server 2016 Support ends Jan 2027**, ESU ends Jan 2029

### **SQL Server End of Support**

2012 SP4 ESU July 2025

2014 SP3 ESU July 2027

**2016 SP3 July 2026 (this is your next big one to worry about)**

2017 Oct 2027

### **Azure AD and MSOnline End of Support**

Both these services come to **end of support on 30 March 2025**

Microsoft has posted detailed information about this [here](#).

## **What's up at FTG**

### **AI in Client Computing - an In-Person event**

With AI in 2025 reshaping how we live, work, and interact with the world, client device computing is also undergoing significant changes driven by technological advancements and evolving user needs.

It's an exciting time to witness these advancements!

**Join Acer and First Technology** as they showcase and share some technology trends which will redefine industries and improve productivity in the years ahead.

**When:** 13 March @ 10:00am

**Where:** Umhlanga Ski Boat Club, 75 Twilight Dr, uMhlanga, KZN

**RSVP:** [Here](#)

### **HPE Aruba New Networking Solutions Unveiled**

Join us for an Exclusive First Technology KZN event in partnership with Aruba to discover how our AI-powered, secure, and scalable infrastructure can transform your business with guest speaker Alan Knott-Craig

**When:** 27 March @ 8:30am

**Where:** First Technology, Office 11 Richefond Circle, Ridgeside Office Park, Umhlanga

**RSVP:** [Here](#)

## **Navigating the Cloud: Life Healthcare's Seamless Transition, With Support From BUI**

With 63 healthcare facilities in southern Africa, the security of Life Healthcare's data is paramount. A move to the Azure Cloud, facilitated by BUI, became the clear and strategic choice.

As a leading South African private healthcare provider, Life Healthcare plays a key role in the health of our nation. While their primary business occurs in wards, theatres and consulting rooms around the country, it is underpinned by a solid IT foundation.

Read more about how BUI enabled Life Healthcare's move to the cloud..... [Navigating the Cloud: Life Healthcare's Seamless Transition, With Support From BUI - BUI](#)

## **Pitfalls with Dynamics 365**

The CRM Team, of First Technology Group [have published a document on ITWeb](#) about avoiding the pitfalls of a D365 Customer engagement implementation. If you are looking to dive down the D365 rabbit hole, this is a good article to read. Then, contact our Dynamics 365 specialists on the [CRM Team website](#) or through your First Technology account manager.

## **Municipality Solution Demonstration**

Join the CRM Team at Microsoft for an event that showcases how cutting-edge technology can transform the way municipalities handle service delivery, from ticket management to AI-powered insights. You can [read more about the event here](#).

**When:** 19 March 2025 from 10H00 - 12H30 ([RSVP by March 12](#))

**Where:** Microsoft Offices, 3012 Winnie Mandela Dr, Bryanston, Sandton.

## **CoPilot Security Demo**

BUI, FTG's security division, can present CoPilot for Security information-sharing sessions, workshops and demos.

In light of ongoing attacks that will only get sneakier, it is essential to contact your First Tech Group account manager to arrange to attend a session. You can also [request a session here](#).

## **What does a World Class SoC look like, and how does it work?**

You are invited to book a tour of one of our SoC (Security Operations Center) nodes (and there are still parts we can't show you). You can [book for the tour here](#).

## **BUI blog - 4th Video Available**

FTG's Azure and security division, BUI, has launched a blog focused on Security—what's new, what's changed, and what you need to do to maintain a sound security posture. The 4th Video in the series is [available here](#). **This video covers some of the Purview announcements at Microsoft Ignite 2024.**

## **Movies**

Grp 1 Pvt School Holidays 21-MAR-25 until 07-APR-25

Public School Holidays 29-MAR-25 until 07-APR-25

Grp 2 Pvt School Holidays 05-APR-25 until 05-MAY-25

Human Rights Day 21-MAR-25

The Line-up for 21 March is going to be INTENSE!!

Now Playing: [Brave the Dark](#)

Now Playing: [The Monkey](#)

07 March: [The Great Lillian Hall](#)

07 March: [A Scam Called Love](#)

07 March: [Mickey 17](#)

07 March: [Rule Breakers](#)

14 March: [Buffalo Kids](#)

14 March: [Cleaner](#)

14 March: [In the Lost Lands](#)

21 March: [Disney's Snow White](#)

21 March: [Som Van Twee](#) - Please support your local cinema!

21 March: [Black Bag](#)  
21 March: [Novocaine](#)  
21 March: [Last Breath](#)  
28 March: [Night of the Zoopacalypse](#)  
28 March: [A working Man](#)

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