

TOP STORIES #128

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.

I recommend you scan through "**Don't Forget**" which is now a separate document for you to download - it was making TOP STORIES too long to read through.

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](#).

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 place in South Africa where you can find a comprehensive list of all the upcoming movies.

Read the story at the bottom of the mail about how a South African movie title got this email completely blocked by some email filtering systems! At least you know they're working!

Last week's [TOP STORIES #127 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

With summer holidays in the northern hemisphere, the number of large shows slows down, but there are still a few worth paying attention to.

Black Hat USA 2025

This is a [major security conference for 2-7 August](#) that has now ended, and what was covered is downright scary! Please see below under security a summary of what happened at black hat....

CEDIA Expo - Denver CO - 3-6 September

This is the premier event where System Integrators for residential and commercial customers come together to see the latest technologies. You can [read more about the show here](#).

It is likely that these shows will fade into the background of the bigger shows like Computex, CES, NAMM etc... as the technologies to transmit audio and video merge with the same tech to transfer data - see the story in [TOP STORIES #120](#) of the frog starting to boil.

Account Manager?

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

Don't Forget

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](#)

Did You Know?

News about services that you may not be aware of is announced in TOP STORIES every fortnight, and occasionally, it is good to remind you about some of the ones announced over the last 2 months.

Here is a quick reference to the last 7, with some worth paying special attention to in red. The link takes you to the relevant TOP STORIES edition - scroll down for the "Did you Know" section

- [Low Code Solutions from First Digital](#) - get problems solved FAST
- [Large Venue ProAV installations](#) - No installation is too big or complicated
- [First CyberMXDR Warranty in South Africa](#) - This is a first for Cyber Security!
- [SOPHOS Platinum Partner](#) - for anything you may ever need from SOPHOS
- [Universal Support](#) - **For ALL your support needs for Microsoft and other Technologies**
- [Monday.com Workflows](#) - The CRMTeam are experts in getting workflows done FAST
- [Firstmarketplace.com](#) - **ALL, and we mean ALL your software procurement through our global marketplace**

Hardware

AMD now commands 33% of the Desktop CPU market

The latest report is that AMD's share is increasing, and though Intel remains the biggest, AMD is starting to eat Intel's lunch, [and you can read more here](#). This means you need to start considering AMD seriously as an alternative to Intel for your corporate hardware - not in terms of making a complete switch but accepting that you will probably have a mixture of hardware. This will largely be transparent to the users, but it will still be important to address the USB-4 and Thunderbolt (Intel) peripheral compatibility issue.

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our hardware specialists to help you review your procurement roadmap to accommodate a more hybrid approach.

Microsoft

Microsoft Increases Simplifies Pricing

Microsoft has announced that it will be dropping EA Volume pricing discounts from 1 November 2025.

You can [read the official announcement here](#). What this means is that all agreements are getting the same price - if you were on a level D, you are now going to get Level A pricing. Clearly, the reason given by Microsoft to simplify licensing and improve pricing clarity is being taken with a grain of salt, as you can read [here in a paper published by Directions on Microsoft](#).

It's going to get more complicated, because anything that is NOT part of your BEC even though you already have an EA in place, will get affected by this change in rules as well (and we still need to read the fine print).

IT IS SUPER IMPORTANT that you contact your First Technology account manager who will help you understand how you may be affected by this announcement in terms of your existing agreement and your upcoming renewal.

Dynamics Licensing Guide updated for August

Fortunately, the update, [which you can download here](#) is not major with only some changes to the Teams Members use rights on Page 53.

Please contact your First Technology Account manager to connect you with our Dynamics specialists to discuss whether these changes may affect you.

Security

Reality Distortion Field - The Velvet Sundown Experiment

Here is something very profound to consider, as it will impact your lives in the future.

Not THIS incident, but others to follow this that will be even more deceptive, with undoubtedly serious consequences.

This is a HUGE opportunity to learn a lesson from the saga and to convey that learning to everyone you care about around you, especially because it is crucial to take measures to ensure

that your staff are better equipped to handle these new types of attacks when your company is targeted.

This is a story much like a Russian Doll, inside one Story, you find another Story, and then another, and so forth. It reads like fiction, except it's not!

There is a lot to read about this on the internet, so I'll take you to the core of the story, the lesson we need to learn and what to do.....

The core of the Story is about Tim Boucher, a safety expert revealing himself to be a hoax under the pseudonym of Andrew Frelon, pranking journalists into thinking he represented a band that itself does not exist as living humans!

This is an example of a reality distortion field.

He **"outs himself" here**, and **explains why here**. And still, we do not know who is behind the band!

In his explanation, he observes:

*"This is an example of social engineering, and something I've seen from other red teaming efforts and my own projects, **that humans are usually the weakest link in any technological system, and often quite easily fooled.**"*

This serves as a warning that everyone, especially board executives, needs training to be more alert to deceptive practices that could mislead them into making strategic decisions harmful to the company, such as being tricked by a competitor into acting in a way that gives the competitor an advantage or worse, have the company's data stolen and ransomed!

It can start with staff being persuaded by people (who did not exist in reality) to grant access or give information verbally that could ultimately "take you out".

Contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our experts in this field.

They can help tailor our training courses in partnership with experts in this field to your business needs, enabling you to start teaching everyone in your company, especially the C-suite, to become more aware of how they and their PA's could be manipulated to allow an incursion.

As Tim Boucher says - *"humans are usually the weakest link"* - he just proved it!

Black Hat - the aftermath

Given the story about Velvet Sundown above, it is worthwhile pondering some of the key messages that came from the Black Hat conference.

The most important message is that **AI is here to stay** and will become more insidious, meaning we will have to evolve new techniques to spot the original or your digital twin (?!?!), who could be directed by people with evil intent.

The pervasive message from the conference is that the human, being the weakest link, will increasingly be the focus of manipulation and attack, and not just you, your family as well - none of you are safe anymore.

You can **read more about some of the key messages from Black Hat here** (and about the digital twin).

I also recommend **watching the 1st 10 mins of the Keynote here**, as it gives a great perspective on where we are today and what has changed - money! - **Here is a longer presentation with most of what was in the keynote.**

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our experts to arrange for the specialised training for your users to help them start being more aware of how they are going to be attacked in the near future, which could be as soon as tomorrow!

Cloud & AI

OpenAI improves GPT-5 - but it's not always right

OpenAI is continuing to make improvements to its new model after receiving a lot of backlash about its release, **which you can read here**.

It's important to remember that ChatGpt (and all the other AIs as well) is **not always right and you should always intellectually evaluate the answer to see if it makes sense**. Human intuition can play a big role in catching an AI out talking nonsense. If you are asking it about something you are not an expert in, it can be good practice to "sanity check" the answer with another AI.

Please contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with our AI experts when looking at implementing AI solutions in your business, as guardrails need to be put in place to ensure that YOUR AI does not go off the rails!

What's up at FTG

FirstMarketplace.com has launched

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

You can be efficient and spend less!

Added this week: Juniper, Infoblox and Scytale

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 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 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 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 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 - 8th, 9th and 10th Videos Available

FTG's Cloud and Security Division, BUI's Video Blog, has posted 3 new videos focusing on Entra

ID. It is highly recommended that you review these videos as they give you an understanding of how to squeeze value out of the Microsoft suites as opposed to buying alternative products which may not be necessary.

No. 8: Streamlining employee onboarding

No. 9: Modernise Remote Access

No. 10: Secure Internet access based on business requirements.

Need Branded Gifts?

Sometimes it is a mission for companies to find year-end gifts for their clients.

You have to find some decent and relevant gifts, get them branded with your company logo, make sure that you are not getting ripped off, get the order placed and hope that you will get them in time for year-end in packaging that you actually expected when you looked at the mockups.

So, if you are looking for gifts and for people who do this all day to do the heavy lifting, you can go here: <https://impactgifts.co.za/> and look through some options, and of course, you can also call the **Gifting Hub** to discuss your requirements.

You can also contact your First Technology account manager to connect you with the "Gifting Experts" to help come up with the perfect gift for your clients!

Movies

It seems that many email scanning systems have decided that a certain South African movie being released on the 29th of August is a big No-No and blocked you from receiving TOP STORIES!

Note Red Sonja has been rescheduled from 15 August to 5 September

Unfortunately, August and a good part of September does not have any major blockbusters lined up, but there is the 50th Anniversary screening of Jaws.....

Now Playing: **Nobody 2**

Now Playing: **Together**

Now Playing: **Grand Prix of Europe**

Now Playing: **Coolie**

Now Playing: **Magazine Dreams**

Now Playing: **War 2**

22 August: **The Myth of Maracuda**

22 August: **Relay**

22 August: **Hunting Jessica Brok**

29 August: **The Roses**

29 August: **Caught Stealing**

29 August: Jaws 50th Anniversary - [watch the documentary here](#) .

29 August: **Afterburn**

29 August: **My (can't use this word) Marelize**

5 September: **Disney Junior Cinema Club** - not much information - yet!

5 September: **The Stolen Girl**

5 September: **Conjuring: The Last Rights**

5 September: **Red Sonja**

12 September: **Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle**

12 September: **Code 3**

12 September: **Downtown Abbey: The grand Finale**

12 September: **The Long Walk**

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