In my last column, I introduced a problem I encountered early in my use of Microsoft’s Office 2007. Today I continue with interesting correspondence from Mark Alexieff, Senior Product Manager for Microsoft Office.

**Question: Why did Microsoft’s engineers decide to preclude having the old UI as an option for customers running the 2007 release?**

The new Microsoft Office Fluent user interface (UI) is focused on making it easier for people to get the results they want when using the Office applications. While the Office applications have increased tremendously in power and added functionality, the core UI has remained substantially unchanged for nearly 20 years. From talking to our customers, it became clear that the menus and toolbars approach to UI no longer did a good job of making application capabilities easily accessible to users. A key principle of the new design is to deliver a “results” oriented interface that maps to what people want to accomplish. An example is that we put 80% of the most frequently used commands within one click of the ribbon. We also wanted to surface some of capabilities that contained within the applications in a more intuitive way. Our customer research showed that much of what customer’s expressed interest in seeing in future versions of the product was in fact already available, but was not intuitive or easy to find based on the menu and tools bar construction.

Customer feedback also indicated that rather than including a classic mode that people could revert to, they wanted us to help them move forward, so that is one reason that it was not included. In addition to redesigning the UI, we’ve added a lot more functionality in the 2007 Microsoft Office system. Faced with the same challenge of making all this new functionality available in the old UI, it made more sense, and would be better for our customers, to focus our resources on doing a great job with the new interface, rather than dilute that effort by implementing new features in two different user interfaces.

In taking such a bold step as redesigning the user interface, we appreciated that it would require some adjustment and a learning curve. Our research showed that for an average user of Office it took 2-3 weeks to return to previous levels of productivity. So far, the response from our customers reinforces that decision as a majority of our customers have provided positive feedback and do not see the new UI as a deployment barrier. That said, as always, Microsoft welcomes feedback on its products from customers to enable it to better meet their needs.

In the next column, I’ll present some analyst research on the new Office Fluent UI that readers may find interesting.

In my last column on this subject, I reflect on my experience communicating with Microsoft officials.
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