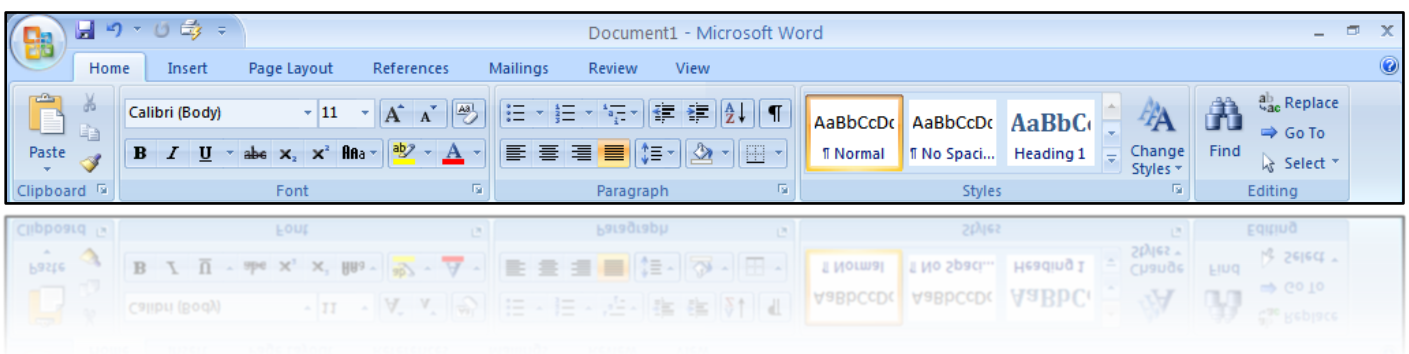


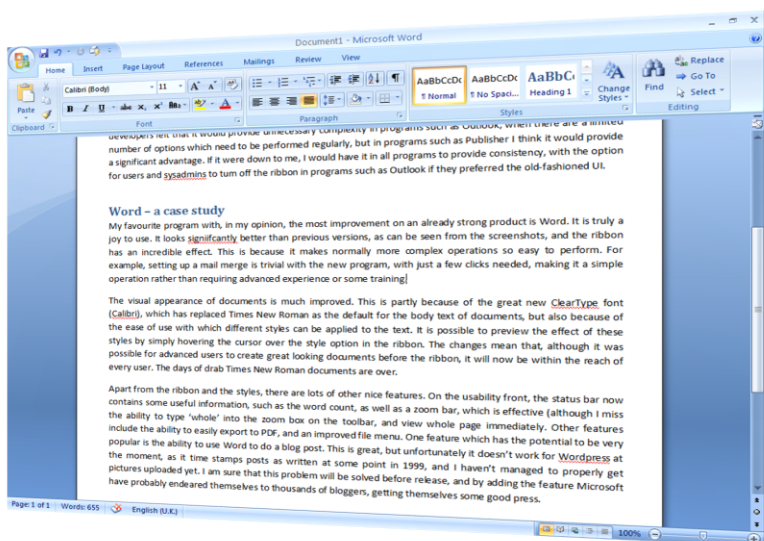
The whole suite

I am extremely impressed. The Ribbon (a new UI feature, instead of conventional menu and toolbars. See this video for a demo) is absolutely fantastic, and has no learning curve at all, which is very important given that Office is a program used by millions of only just computer literate people around the world who don't like changes to their software. The improvement that it gives to ease of use cannot be underestimated, and it works entirely intuitively. The only problem I anticipate is that the Ribbon is inexplicably not used in all of the office programs. Perhaps the developers felt that it would provide unnecessary complexity in programs such as Outlook, when there are a limited number of options which need to be performed regularly, but in programs such as Publisher I think it would provide a significant advantage. If it were down to me, I would have it in all programs to provide consistency, with the option for users and sysadmins to turn off the ribbon in programs such as Outlook if they preferred the old-fashioned UI.



Word – a case study

My favourite program with, in my opinion, the most improvement on an already strong product is Word. It is truly a joy to use. It looks significantly better than previous versions, as can be seen from the screenshots, and the ribbon has an incredible effect. This is because it makes normally more complex operations so easy to perform. For example, setting up a mail merge is trivial with the new program, with just a few clicks needed, making it a simple operation rather than requiring advanced experience or some training.



The visual appearance of documents is much improved. This is partly because of the great new ClearType font (Calibri), which has replaced Times New Roman as the default for the body text of documents, but also because of the ease of use with which different styles can be applied to the text. It is possible to preview the effect of these

styles by simply hovering the cursor over the style option in the ribbon. The changes mean that, although it was possible for advanced users to create great looking documents before the ribbon, it will now be within the reach of every user. The days of drab Times New Roman documents are over.

Apart from the ribbon and the styles, there are lots of other nice features. On the usability front, the status bar now contains some useful information, such as the word count, as well as a zoom bar, which is effective (although I miss the ability to type 'whole' into the zoom box on the toolbar, and view whole page immediately. Other features include the ability to easily export to PDF, and an improved file menu. One feature which has the potential to be very popular is the ability to use Word to do a blog post. This is great, but unfortunately it doesn't work for Wordpress at the moment, as it time stamps posts as written at some point in 1999, and I haven't managed to properly get pictures uploaded yet. I am sure that this problem will be solved before release, and by adding the feature Microsoft have probably endeared themselves to thousands of bloggers, getting themselves some good press.

Conclusions

Will the release be a success? A resounding yes. It provides a significant advance in features (which makes the tech savvy users happy), whilst improving in usability to make those features visible and, crucially, usable to even the most inexperienced or inept. And even at this Beta 2 stage, it is a highly polished and stable product. I have not had any stability issues with the release, and the only bug I have found is not really even a bug, but a design oversight. Office 2007 is the office suite for 2007, and has really pulled away from OpenOffice.org, it's nearest competitor. I think that this release justifies the future cost. For the moment though, the beta is free (although it expires on the 31/01/07). Grab it now, and then you'll know what I'm raving about. Incidentally, if you're worried about performance issues, it runs at a perfectly respectable speed on my 1.7 ghz Pentium M laptop with 512 ram.

[PS, this post was posted using Microsoft Word, so that I could use the funky screenshot effects that the new version of Word can do. It was quite a convoluted process, involving changing the timestamp of the post and the html of the post so that the pictures were displayed. You can download a PDF of the post [here](#)]