The 5-Point Guide to Maximising Productivity for Small Businesses

How to improve your team's productivity through simpler, online collaboration

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FOR PEOPLE IN BUSINESS

The small business conundrum

As a small business owner, your focus needs to be on running the business, keeping your customers happy and making sure that your staff are as productive as possible.

But in this age of high-speed Internet, mobile communications and remote working, how do you ensure that your scattered workers collaborate effectively and securely?

How can you make sure that day-to-day operations are all running smoothly when you have so many other things on your plate?

Never fear, technology is here!

Cloud solutions such as Office 365 and Microsoft Teams have become so advanced recently that they can already guarantee increased productivity and collaboration.

In fact, you've probably already got Office 365 and you may think you're already making good use of it. But are you really getting the most out of it? Perhaps you're just using the email service and the latest version of Word and Excel... but what other secrets are hiding in Office 365 for you to unlock?

We've put together this short guide to help you get started. Working day-in, day-out with Office 365, we know a trick or two when it comes to some of the best features. So we thought we'd share these secrets with you on 5 areas that we frequently get asked about by our customers.

1. Communication and Collaboration
2. Employee Engagement
3. Planning and Task Management
4. Information Sharing
5. Scaling your Business

1. Communication and Collaboration
Get the Most Out of Microsoft Teams

The new era of instant messaging and collaboration

80%
of businesses are already using collaboration tools, according to McKinsey

10m
daily active users of the chat-driven application Slack
Source

13m
daily active users of Microsoft Teams
Source

Why do they work so well?

Real-time messaging makes for speedy communication, while high-quality video and audio, combined with screen-sharing, make online meetings with your team feel as natural as in-person sessions.

But isn't organising your team difficult online?

No, it's done effortlessly through Groups and Channels.

Organise workers into groups or teams.

Each workspace can then be separated into different channels, or chats, for each topic.

To get someone's attention, just @tag a colleague in your message.

Finally, you can also unite your social media channels and other business apps on the collaboration platform, helping you avoid app hopping and making sure your teams are fully up-to-date with everything that's going on.

1. Communication and Collaboration
Get the Most Out of Microsoft Teams

How to get started

1. Build a small pilot team with a specific goal in mind – perhaps think of something fun to get started, such as organising a work Christmas party!

2. Create your first group.

3. Download Teams across all the devices that your team regularly uses.

4. Invite your pilot team to the workspace.

5. Post about the group's goals and rules to get started.

6. Attach any relevant documents and media into the File section.

7. Then maintain consistent posting every day to encourage engagement and set a good example.
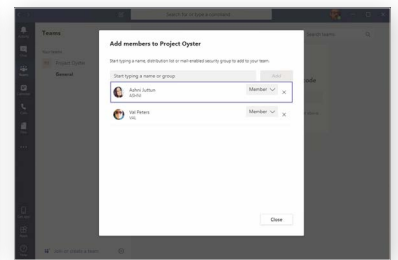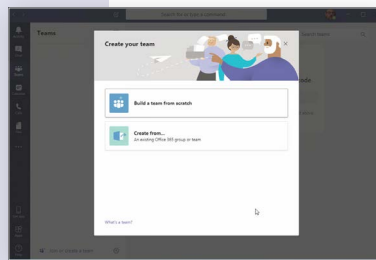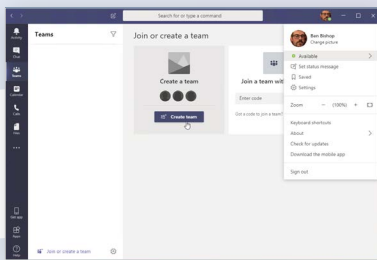
"We collaborate extensively with business partners, such as *ITbuilder*, to manage the projects and initiatives that we're working on. The Teams channels we operate between us, to chat and share information, allow us to move these along daily, cutting out the need for frequent meetings. If we do decide that a quick meeting is required, we just flip to a video session within Teams between the guys in the various offices and get it done there and then."

Andy Olliver, Vuelio

Is Microsoft Teams sounding like a lifesaver right now?
Why not book a Free Teams Demo and be your own judge?

Book a demo

2. Employee Engagement
Making the Most of Internal Comms Channels

Why internal comms channels?

Using tools like online noticeboards is a great way to share newsletters or group pages in order to increase staff engagement. Keeping workers updated is crucial and can easily be done through the previously mentioned channels in Teams. In addition, Teams is great for organising specific conversation threads, which help workers keep up-to-date with initiatives and projects.

But you can also think outside of the box with software like Teams.

Engagement can be boosted by organising games and competitions in dedicated channels. The real-time aspect makes them as stimulating as real-life contests.

Working out your channel topic

Get to know your employees first through in-chat polls.

Think of contests relating to punctuality or out-of-office activities in order to include everyone.

Give your winners recognition, maybe set up a leaderboard both online and in the office.

Remember consistency is key – keep the contests going and build engagement over time.

2. Employee Engagement
Making the Most of Internal Comms Channels

How to get started

Teams creates a General channel as soon as you create a group. To create another channel, the basics remain the same:

1. **Decide on the competition, game or topic you want to get started with.**
2. **Select "Add channel".**
3. **Name your channel based on its purpose, namely the project or subject.**
4. **Save the channel as a Favourite if you want it to automatically appear in the whole team's channel list.**
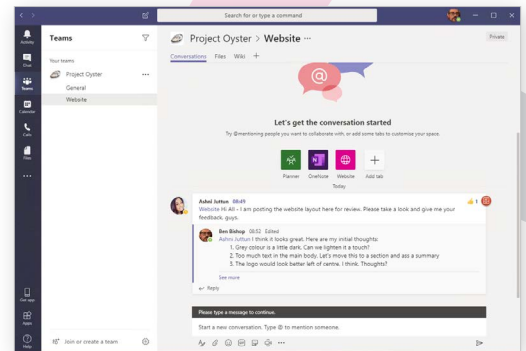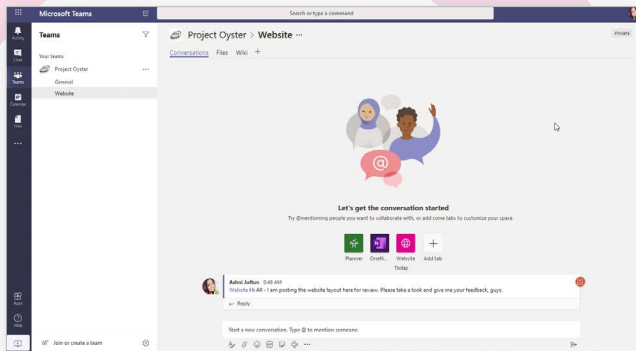
"We have a team of field technicians that only visit the office once or twice. They used to feel detached from the business culture and relied on email bulletins to stay engaged. Since we implemented Microsoft Teams, they are fully tuned into what is happening in the company as a whole, as well as the activity of the workgroups they belong to."

Claudia Marcellis, HR Director

3. Planning and Task Management
Manage your staff, manage your work

What to use

Managing tasks and staff can be as stressful as being chased around your workspace by a knife-wielding Chucky. By integrating Microsoft's Planner feature, planning and task management becomes child's play – the relieving kind.

Creating plans to keep tasks and projects on track is a cinch and will enable cross-departmental collaboration.

Why use them?

An effective task management app offers:

calendar functionality;

note-taking features;

the ability to attach files;

dashboards to organise and track tasks.

Team leaders have the power to check if these tasks have been completed, examine employees' current workloads, and identify problems that need to be addressed.

Additional features include: the ability to @tag people so they know an action is their responsibility to complete, assigning due dates and setting up late notifications that integrate with Outlook, and the ability to complete tasks in real-time so that project teams can see status updates at a glance.

3. Planning and Task Management
Manage your staff, manage your work

How to get started

1. **Create a planner tab with an existing plan or by creating a new one.**

2. **Start adding tasks and flag them with coloured labels to make them recognisable.**

3. **Assign workers to specific tasks.**

4. **Create buckets to categorise your different tasks.**

5. **Use progress labels to let users know how the task is proceeding.**
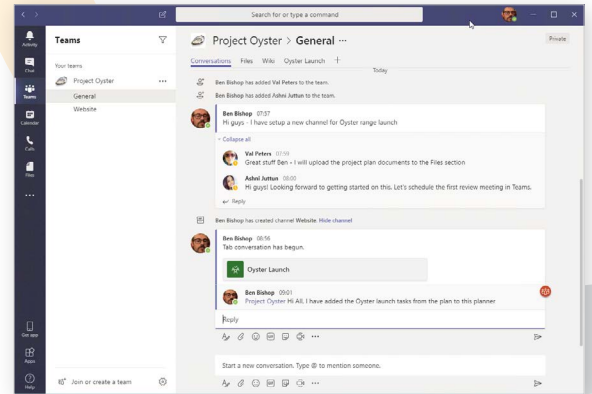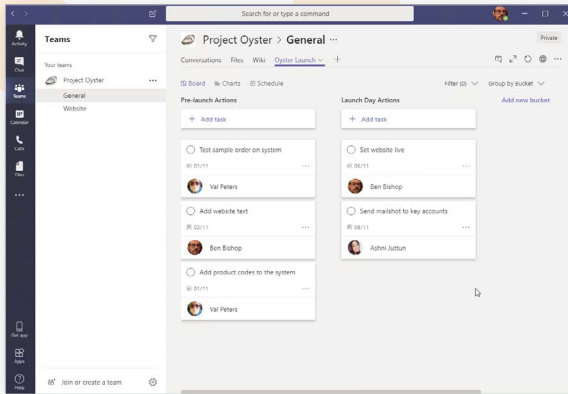
"We were struggling to keep tabs on the progress of our website refresh until we started using the Planner app on Office 365. Plugging the planner into Teams allowed us to keep track of the tasks with our developer, who works in a different time zone. We could change the status and add notes on each task, then get an overview each morning when we logged in. Perfect!"

Andrew McKenna, Best Reception

4. Information Sharing
Share and Collaborate in Real-Time

What exactly is Information Sharing?

The easiest way to share information in this day and age is on the cloud. Current ways of working demand that you ditch that old-fashioned folder structure on your S drive and use a real file-sharing tool.

With Teams, you can group files by subject, date, team, etc. to improve findability, as well as

What are the perks?

Quick access to crucial information.

Saves employees hassle and time.

Files can be shared quickly with multiple users by creating libraries.

Multiple users can work on the same document at the same time.

This last point is a real time-saver too as you can even chat about edits in real-time, eliminating the need for unnecessary back and forth and resolving queries in an instant.

4. Information Sharing
Share and Collaborate in Real-Time

How to get started

File sharing nowadays is a piece of cake, especially on cloud platforms such as SharePoint.

With Teams, the great thing is that it organises SharePoint document libraries into your channels. Thereby enabling direct, online collaboration – even simultaneously with multiple users, and with different permission settings too.

But how do you set up a SharePoint Team site?

1. **Create a site.**

2. **Choose 'Team'.**

3. **Name your Team site and give it a description, then choose whether to make it public or private.**

4. **Invite team members.**

"Working on document drafts used to be a headache when we had a shared S: drive on the office server. People would make edits and save different versions (sometimes in a different folder!) and it was difficult to track the latest one. Now with SharePoint, users can collaborate on documents and edit them simultaneously. No more merging of versions – yay! With file libraries organised by project or workgroup in Teams, we don't even have to worry about people saving them to the wrong location either."

Richard, DK Daleba

It's that simple!

After your Team site is set up, you can go a step further by assigning permissions to team members, customising site navigation, and sharing files with external users. It's better to begin with the default solution and customise at a later time when users are more familiar with the set-up.

Tired of drowning in S: drive clutter?
Book a Free Demo now!

Book a demo

5. Scaling Your Business
Go Advanced with 3rd Party Integrations and More

The Art of the Possible – a.k.a. 3rd Party Integrations

Most collaboration technologies nowadays can integrate with a range of third-party apps. Teams, for example, can integrate around 230 apps and bots, including Zoho, Asana, Hive and Polly.

With a polling app like Polly, you can collect information about your workers without disrupting workflows as it runs in tandem with conversations; while an automated assistant bot lets workers offload their mundane administrative tasks such as setting up and managing sales orders.
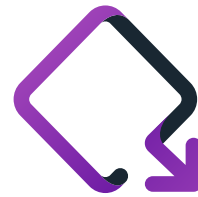
Do you need them?

Third-party integrations aren't essential, but they can expand your capabilities and bring added value to your business on two levels:

Internally
They help with the management of wider employee engagement initiatives as your business grows in size.

Externally
They're superb at managing client relationships and succeed in keeping everything in one place alongside your internal processes and tools.

"We've cut out so much internal email with clever widgets and integrations that are easy to set up in Teams. Survey results we run online are posted into a channel that is monitored by our marketing group. Our service desk gets instant feedback on their work when it is rated on our ticketing system and shared to everybody. We even set up ad-hoc polls on what to order in for lunch – yum."

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5. Scaling Your Business
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How to get started

To get started, why not try out 1 of our recommended Top 5 integrations:

Freehand

An app that acts as a digital whiteboard where you can add images and sketches as well as words, creating a straightforward graphic design workflow.

Twitter

Tweets with your handle or hashtag are sent straight to Teams, from where you may reply or respond without hopping between apps.

MindMeister

Provides a user-friendly online mind mapping tool. Users can share ideas for upcoming projects and develop them with teammates.
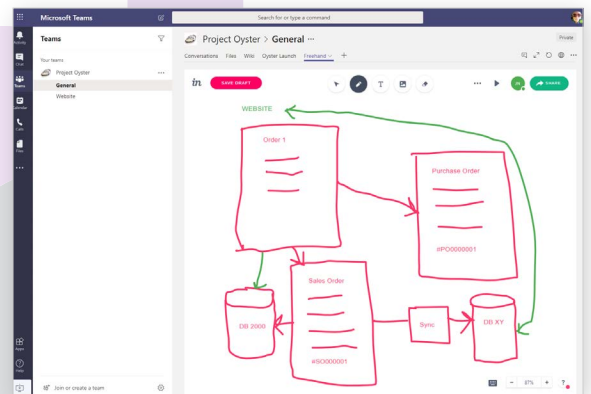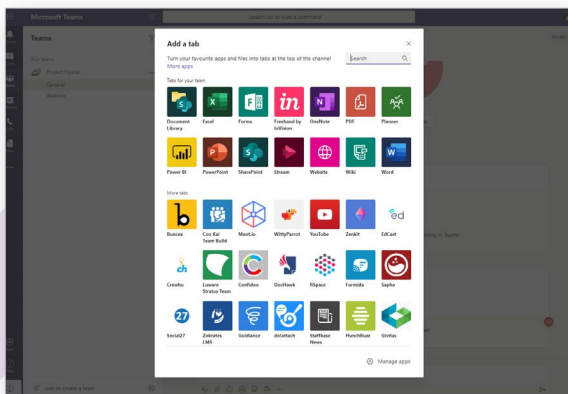
Zoom.ai

This little bot lets you send reminders, brief you, schedule meetings, and overall, save time that can be used for more appropriate tasks.

Qubie

This team improvement app regularly checks your team's morale and performance, as well as providing instant feedback.

Reap the rewards

Running a business requires tremendous effort, but Office 365 provides genuine assistance that can lighten the load.

By using the information in this guide, you'll finally be able to encourage communication and engagement, coordinate your team, get rid of the complications of file-sharing, and tap into the true potential of Office 365.

Want to find out more?
Why not get in touch with the ITbuilder team.

Find out more