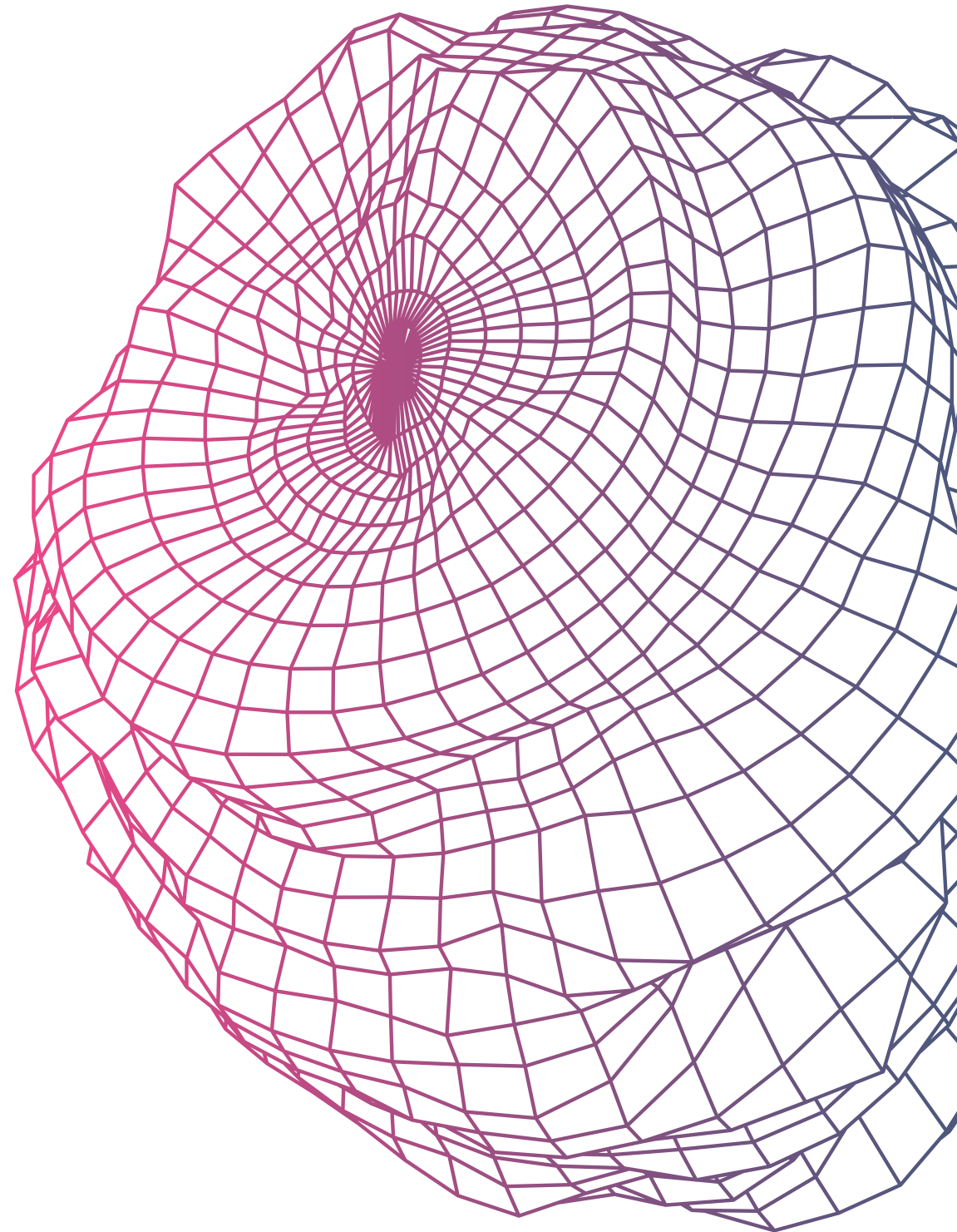




# Taming Tool Sprawl:

How SMBs Can Simplify  
IT and Power Productivity



# Introduction

## The Hidden Cost of Disconnected Tools

No business owner wakes up and decides to create a messy, fragmented IT stack, yet it's a reality in thousands of organisations. Tool sprawl isn't the result of poor judgment. More often, it starts innocently enough:

- Someone needs a way to share files, so they sign up for a solution.
- A new hire recommends a chat tool they used before.
- A marketing lead tries a scheduling platform on a free trial.

One tool here, another there. Before long, teams are juggling apps for messaging, video calls, reviews, calendar links, document storage, note-taking, surveys and more.

The result? Rising costs. Conflicting security settings. Poor employee experience. Data siloes. Forgotten tools. Missed information.

We have seen this play out in real time, with **78% of business leaders stating they are using more digital tools than ever before.**

But businesses that have tackled tool sprawl all discover the same thing:

You don't need more tools. You need smarter tools that are connected, integrated, and secure.

That's exactly what Microsoft 365 is designed to offer. A single, unified platform where teams can communicate, collaborate, create, protect data, and stay productive, all from one simplified system.

In this eBook, we'll explore why tool sprawl happens (and why it matters), what successful consolidation looks like, how AI tools fit into the equation and how your business can take practical steps towards a more focused, secure IT environment.

"We're using 3+ separate tools for file sharing, messaging, and meetings."

"Our users have to log in to 5+ platforms just to do everyday tasks."

"We've added AI tools... but we're unsure who's using them or how."

"We don't know where our data lives across all these tools."

"There's no single source of truth for files or conversations."

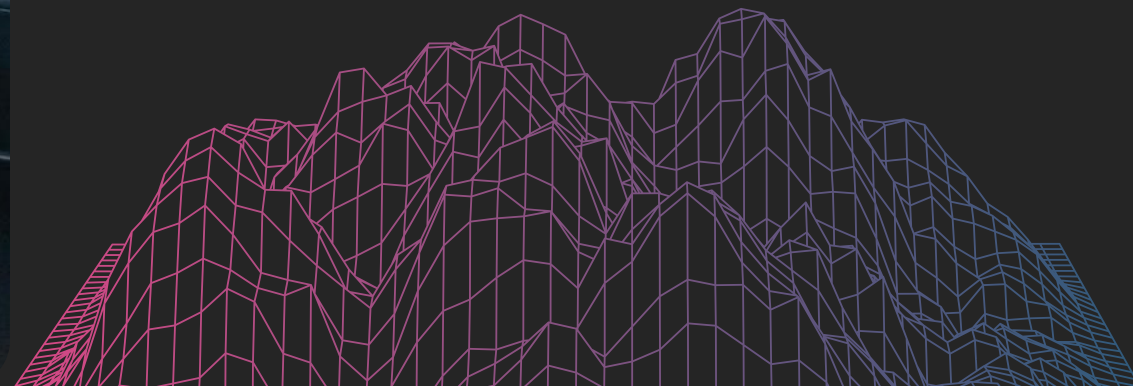
"I've seen staff using tools they were never approved to use."

Does any of this sound familiar?



# How Tool Sprawl Happens (and Why it Matters)

Even the most well-managed businesses can find themselves tangled in a web of disconnected apps and overlapping tools. It can feel chaotic, but it didn't happen overnight, and it's often no one person's fault. To fix the issue, we first need to understand what's really happening and why.



# What's Happening?

Tool sprawl creeps into everyday operations in subtle ways. While each tool may have seemed like a solution at the time, their combined effects create serious pain points across the business:

## Security Risks

When teams use their own unsanctioned tools, sometimes without informing IT, it introduces what's known as shadow IT. 88% of security professionals believe that downloading software to do their jobs that is not approved by IT increases the risk of falling victim to an attack. This is due to inconsistent multi-factor authentication (MFA), poor identity access management (IAM), and limited visibility over user activity make security governance harder and riskier.

## Productivity Gaps

Switching between apps all day creates interruptions and lost time. Some employees may use a free version of Zoom limited to 45-minute meetings; others are forced to re-enter data into multiple systems. Duplicate work, missed updates, and persistent friction become the norm.

## Disjointed Collaboration

Siloed tools mean siloed conversations. If one team is using Slack, another Teams, and a third group is still emailing attachments, real-time collaboration becomes almost impossible. Simple tasks like updating one shared document can turn into version-control nightmares.

## A Strained Employee Experience

New starters often spend hours requesting access or getting trained on niche or outdated tools. And when someone leaves, especially from your IT team, the knowledge required to manage these systems can disappear with them, and upskilling replacements burns time and budget.

## Uncontrolled Costs

Multiple apps with overlapping features mean money is wasted on subscriptions that could be avoided. Many businesses also forget about underused licences or auto-renewing contracts. What's more, standalone tools rarely offer value at scale as consolidating often unlocks efficiencies and cost benefits through integrated "all-in-one" platforms.



# Why is it Happening?

If all of this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Tool sprawl usually develops over time, driven by understandable decisions made in busy moments:

## 1. Fast Growth = Fast Decisions

When a business scales quickly, teams often choose the first tool that meets an urgent need, whether or not it's long-term compatible with other systems.

## 2. Departmental Choices

With minimal centralised governance, individual departments or employees sign up for tools that work for their team, without considering broader compatibility or IT oversight.

## 3. Temporary Fixes That Stick

That "trial version" used to make something work in a pinch? It often becomes a permanent part of the stack, even when better options arise.

## 4. Single-Use Solutions

Many tools do just one thing well, such as scheduling, forms, chat or analytics, but don't play nicely with anything else. If you stack too many of them and the friction starts to show.

Tool sprawl isn't just an IT inconvenience. It affects everything from how your staff communicate to how secure your data is, to whether your growth is actually scalable.

But here's the good news: with the right approach, consolidation can reduce risk, cut costs, and put your people back in control of their tools, rather than the other way around.



# Consolidation for Liberation: What a Connected Stack Looks Like

When systems work in harmony, everything feels easier.

Imagine a workspace where meetings, messaging, file sharing, collaboration, reporting, and even security are all part of one connected environment. That means no need for separate logins, conflicting formats, or endless switching between tabs. Forrester found that this level of consolidation can save an employee 1 hour per week.

That's the power of consolidation. Not giving up flexibility, but gaining **clarity**, **control**, and **cohesion**.

For many businesses, Microsoft 365 delivers this. It brings together everyday tools, such as email, calendars, chat, documents, video calls, automation, and even AI, into one intelligent ecosystem. It's secure, user-friendly, and designed for productivity from the ground up.

In the following pages, we'll take a look at the wide range of tools included in Microsoft 365, showing how they complement each other, reduce redundancy, and give your team the freedom to focus on what really matters: doing great work.

## Productivity

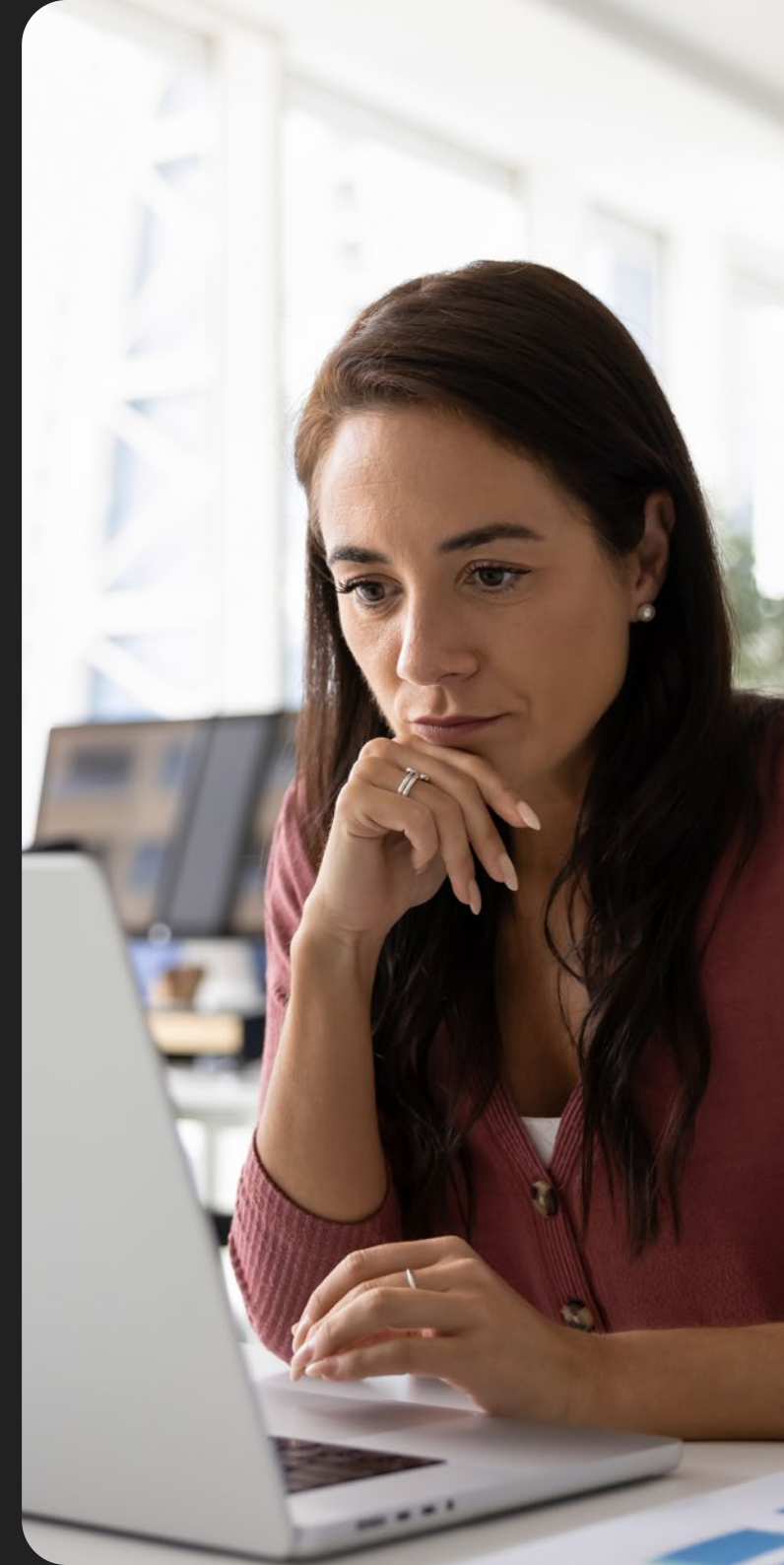
When you think of Microsoft 365, Word, PowerPoint and Excel likely come to mind. That's for good reason, as these three applications are used by most businesses, but this is just scratching the surface of what productivity solution Microsoft 365 has to offer.



**Microsoft Planner** is a work management tool designed to bring together to-do lists, plans and projects into a single solution. It has two common use cases for employees in all departments. Individuals can use Planner to create and manage their to-do lists and create tasks manually or from emails. It can also be used as a project management tool, with features like project templates, task dependencies, GANTT and kanban views, backlogs, sprints and more. Planner can be used in place of other solutions such as Monday.com or Asana.



**OneNote** is your simple but powerful digital notebook that can be used for all your notetaking needs. It includes everything you would expect, such as pages, categories, annotations and formatting, but it also includes additional functionality such as voice dictation and the ability to share pages with colleagues. OneNote can be used in place of Coda, Anytype or taking notes in a traditional word processor.





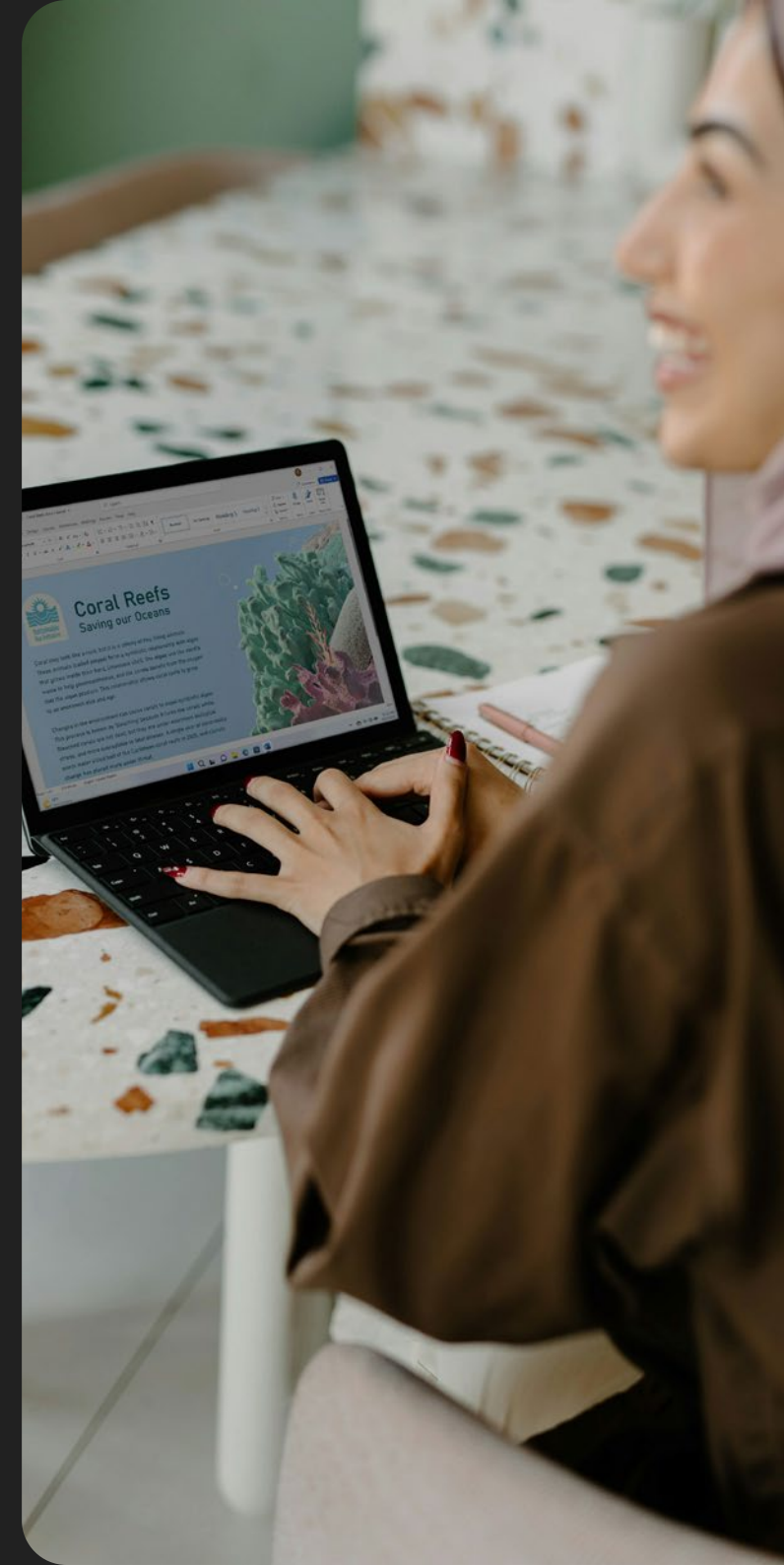
**Microsoft Whiteboard** is an infinite digital whiteboard that can be used for brainstorming or workshoping in meetings. The most common use case that we see is in meetings, as a way to easily collaborate; however, with sticky notes, pre-built templates and ample drawing tools, there are many other ways that Whiteboard can be used in place of tools like Miro or Mural.



**Microsoft Loop** is a tool that integrates many of the previously mentioned tools into one place for collaboration and productivity. Employees can use Loop to create wikis, project management dashboards, and more, with embedded components that can be accessed by other employees. Loop can be used in place of tools like Notion.



**Editor** is a tool that integrates many of the previously mentioned tools into one place for collaboration and productivity. Employees can use Loop to create wikis, project management dashboards, and more, with embedded components that can be accessed by other employees. Loop can be used in place of tools like Notion.



# Communication

Microsoft 365 has a range of communication tools, designed for different experiences, including everything from real-time multimodal communication to asynchronous communication.



**Microsoft Teams** is a comprehensive communication platform that combines voice chat, video chat, instant messaging, document collaboration, calendars, file storage and workspace management into one place. When businesses look into consolidation, Teams is often the most impactful solution as it significantly cuts down on the number of applications any given employee has to use. Teams can be used in place of tools like Zoom or Slack.



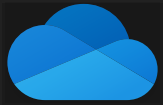
**Microsoft Outlook** is the original email client that is constantly receiving new updates for functionality and integration. In its simplest form, it acts as a tool to send and receive emails, but it is more powerful as it integrates your email, calendar and contacts all in one place. Outlook is the gold standard that can be used in place of tools like Gmail or Zoho Mail.



**Teams Phone** is a cloud-based telephony solution that integrates with Microsoft Teams and allows employees to make and receive phone calls from any device, ultimately replacing your legacy phone system. It includes smart features, such as transcripts, group calls, call queues, auto attendants and more. Teams Phone can be used in place of tools like 3CX or Avaya.



## File Sharing & Collaboration



**OneDrive** is your personal cloud storage solution in Microsoft 365. Each employee has their own secure space to store files, access them from any device, and share them with colleagues or external users. Because OneDrive integrates directly with tools like Outlook, Teams, Word, and PowerPoint, it's easy to attach, edit, and collaborate on documents in real time, without needing to re-upload or version-control every file. OneDrive can be used in place of file storage tools like Dropbox or Google Drive.



**SharePoint Online** is the backbone of organised collaboration. It allows businesses to create structured document libraries, internal team sites, and shared drives that are secure, permission-controlled, and searchable. Unlike simple file storage services, SharePoint makes it easy to define who should have access to what, and integrates with Teams and OneDrive to create a seamless file experience. SharePoint can be used in place of tools like Box, Egnyte, or even internal shared drives and legacy file servers.



**Microsoft Bookings** is a tool that simplifies scheduling meetings, calls, or appointments, whether for one person or across a team. Staff can set their availability, share personalised booking pages, and allow external parties to choose a time that works for them, without endless back-and-forth emails. Bookings is especially useful for client-facing teams, HR departments, and support queues, and can be used in place of solutions like Calendly, Acuity, or YouCanBook.me.



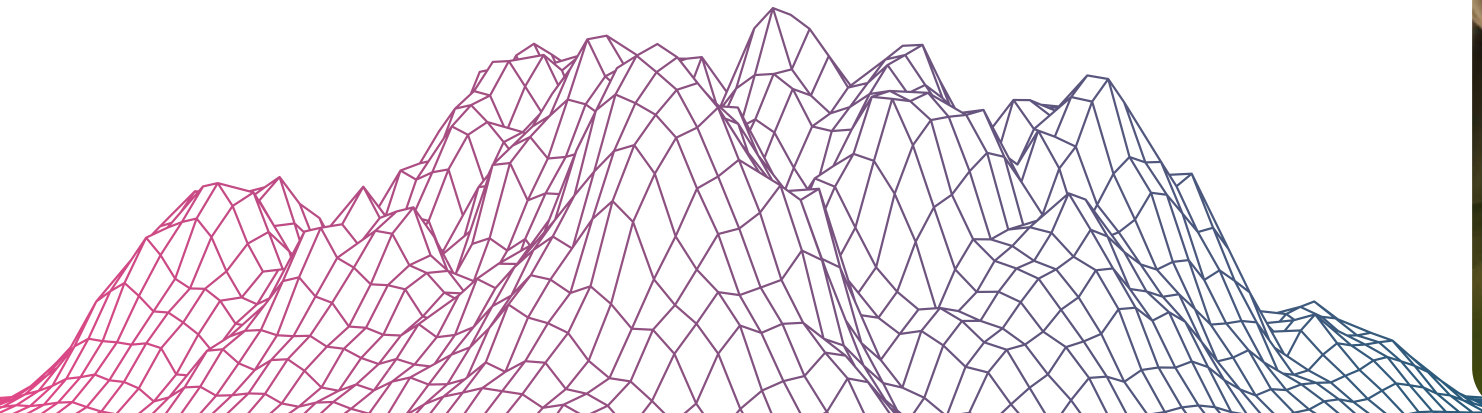
# Data



**Power BI** is Microsoft's data visualisation platform, designed to help businesses turn raw data into charts, dashboards, and interactive reports. What makes Power BI powerful is its integration with a wide variety of data sources, making it easy to connect and analyse data, wherever it is located. Businesses can use it to track KPIs, create custom reporting dashboards, and make more informed decisions. Power BI can be used in place of tools like Tableau, Looker, or Google Data Studio.



**Microsoft Forms** is a simple but effective tool for creating online forms, polls, and surveys. It's often used for internal feedback, customer satisfaction surveys, event RSVPs, and quick data collection. With automatic results tracking, Excel export options, and integration with Teams and Outlook, Forms makes it easy to gather useful insights. Forms can be used in place of third-party tools like SurveyMonkey, Typeform, or Jotform.



## Creativity



**ClipChamp** is Microsoft's easy-to-use video editor, included in Microsoft 365. It allows users to trim, cut, add effects, and create videos quickly, with no video experience required. With built-in templates for social media, product explainers, and internal training videos, it's ideal for teams that need to create content fast. Clipchamp provides a solid alternative to tools like CapCut or Canva's video editor.



**Microsoft Designer** is a browser-based graphic design tool that helps employees create professional-looking visuals, presentations, and marketing assets. Powered by AI, Designer can take your content and automatically generate layouts, colour schemes, and visual suggestions. It's especially handy for non-designers who still need high-quality outputs. Designer can be used as an alternative to tools like Canva or Adobe Express.



# Automation

The Power Platform is a suite of low-code tools for automating tasks, building apps, and analysing data, without needing a developer. It includes:



## Power Automate

for building custom workflows (e.g. send notifications, move files, trigger approvals)



## Power Apps

for building simple business tools tailored to internal needs



## Power BI

for reporting and analytics (covered above)



## Copilot Studio

for building chatbots that can answer internal or customer queries

The Power Platform is especially useful for streamlining repetitive processes and improving productivity across departments. It offers an integrated alternative to using multiple separate tools, like Zapier for automation or Airtable for apps.

# Security

It's clear that Microsoft 365 comes jam-packed with tools that will enable you to consolidate your employee tools, but most businesses have a set of tools that sit in the background to keep data, devices and identities safe and secure.

With Microsoft 365, security is built in, not bolted on. Whether you need straightforward protection out of the box or more advanced capabilities for regulated industries or mobile workforces, Microsoft gives you the flexibility to scale your security with your needs.

For most small and medium-sized businesses, the essential parts of a security stack include identity controls, email protection, and ways to manage devices that access company data. These features are already included in Microsoft 365, giving you a strong foundation to replace common security add-ons.



**Identity and Access Management (IAM)** is built into Microsoft 365 through features like single sign-on (SSO), multi-factor authentication (MFA), and conditional access. This ensures that the right people have access to the right resources – and only when they meet certain criteria.



**Email Threat Protection** is provided through Microsoft 365. It scans for phishing attacks, ransomware, malicious attachments, and suspicious links, automatically removing threats before they reach a user's inbox.





**Mobile Device Management (MDM)** allows businesses to enforce simple but powerful controls on phones, tablets, and laptops, such as requiring a passcode or the ability to remotely wipe data. For many SMBs, enabling MDM within Microsoft 365 replaces the need for standalone tools.

For businesses with more advanced needs around access control, compliance, data residency or governance, Microsoft offers a full-scale security suite that rivals even the most complex enterprise stacks, all centrally managed and deeply integrated.



**Entra ID** is Microsoft's modern identity management platform. It provides enhanced access policies, user roles, and monitoring for businesses that require stringent access control, identity governance, or guest access provisioning.



**Microsoft Intune** enables full endpoint management. It allows organisations to deploy and manage PCs and mobile devices with granular controls, from security baselines to approved app lists and remote wipes. It's an ideal solution for distributed workforces or businesses shifting away from unmanaged BYOD policies.





**Purview** is Microsoft's data governance and information compliance platform. It helps you discover where sensitive information lives, understand how it's being used, classify important data, and apply policies to protect it. For organisations managing client data or needing to meet compliance standards like GDPR, this replaces the need for dedicated DLP or data classification tools.



**Microsoft Defender for Business** provides advanced threat protection for endpoints, including real-time antivirus, ransomware detection, remediation tools, and threat analytics. It leverages insights from Microsoft's global threat intelligence network, helping small teams stay protected against increasingly sophisticated attacks.



**Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD)** offers businesses a scalable, secure virtual desktop infrastructure, allowing employees to access a full desktop environment from anywhere, while keeping data off local devices. It's especially useful for businesses with seasonal staff, remote workforces, or specific compliance requirements around data access.

Together, these tools form a comprehensive security framework that is deeply integrated with the rest of Microsoft 365. This not only helps reduce risk and licensing complexity, but it also gives businesses the confidence to scale without introducing gaps or overheads from managing disconnected systems.



## Productivity



# The Microsoft 365 Connected Stack



## Data



## Communication



## Creativity



## File Sharing & Collaboration



## Security



## Automation





## The AI Puzzle: More Tools, or Smarter Ones?

AI is already being used by employees in almost every business. Whether driven by curiosity or workload pressure, teams are turning to AI-powered tools to help manage meetings, emails, content, and more.

But here's the challenge: most of these tools are built to solve one specific problem at a time. This results in businesses with even more platforms, more cost, more data siloes, and more disconnected workflows.

Let's take a look at where AI tools are being adopted and how quickly they become yet another sprawl problem.

# The AI Puzzle: More Tools, or Smarter Ones?

## AI for Meetings

AI notetakers join video meetings to provide real-time transcription, summaries, and action item tracking. They help attendees stay focused on the conversation instead of scrambling to take notes, while ensuring key decisions aren't forgotten.

Popular tools include [Fireflies.ai](#), [Otter.ai](#), and [Read AI](#), with pricing typically between \$10–\$40 per user/month.

## AI for Content

These tools generate written content to help employees compose emails, reports, social media copy, proposals, and presentations faster, without starting from a blank page.

While they're widely used in marketing and sales teams, they can benefit anyone who spends time writing on the job. Tools like [Copy.ai](#), [Jasper](#), [ChatGPT](#), and [Gemini](#) range from \$20–\$60 per month, depending on features.

## AI for Emails

Inbox overload is a common problem for most employees. AI-powered email tools help by highlighting important messages, summarising long threads, and even generating suggested replies based on context.

Email is used across every department, so these tools have wide appeal, but they add another silo. Services like [Shortwave](#), [Superhuman](#), and [Mailbutler](#) typically range from \$9–\$36 per user/month.

## AI for Project Planning

AI is also making its way into project management tools, helping teams prioritise tasks, forecast timelines, and allocate resources automatically. It's particularly useful for cross-functional teams or those juggling multiple projects.

Products like [Asana AI](#), [Monday.com](#), and [ClickUp Brain](#) embed smart features into popular platforms, with prices ranging from free to around \$20 per user/month for more advanced tiers.

## AI for Assistance

AI assistants act as general-purpose helpers across daily tasks, offering support for writing, research, planning, and time management. Ideally, they should integrate with your calendars, emails, and files, but most don't.

Tools like [ChatGPT](#), [Gemini](#), and [Motion](#) fall into this category, costing around \$19–\$30 per user/month, depending on the plan.

# The Solution: AI for Everything



If you were to roll out all these tools to every employee, the minimum monthly cost would be around \$49 per user, and for most businesses, it could easily exceed **\$100 per user/month** when combining tools for meetings, content, email, planning, and assistance.

And even then, there's a core problem:

These tools don't talk to each other. They don't connect to your core business systems. And your data lives in five or six separate clouds.

**Microsoft Copilot** solves this problem differently. Rather than relying on dozens of individual AI tools, Copilot is built directly into the Microsoft 365 apps your teams already use, such as Word, Excel, Outlook, Teams, and more.

It means:

- Meeting summaries generated from Teams
- Email suggestions are built directly in Outlook
- Real-time assistance while writing reports in Word
- Data-driven insights pulled from internal Excel sheets and SharePoint libraries

Best of all, it's part of your existing Microsoft 365 environment, so it is secure, compliant, and consistent with your existing permissions and data controls.

Copilot is priced at \$30 per user/month and is designed to act as a single, intelligent layer across your entire workplace, helping you avoid yet another sprawl of disconnected AI point solutions.





# What Consolidation Looks Like in Practice

We've covered the tools, explored the problems, and talked about the potential benefits, but what does a simplified, consolidated tech stack actually look like in the day-to-day?

Let's take a look at a typical workday for a knowledge worker using Microsoft 365, Copilot, and the built-in security tools that keep it all safe behind the scenes.

## 08:30 Starting the Day Smarter

As Emma powers on her laptop, she signs in using single sign-on with multi-factor authentication. The same secure login gets her into Outlook, Teams, OneDrive, and all her core business apps. Her device passes a compliance check via Intune, confirming it's encrypted and has the latest updates installed.

Copilot summarises her inbox and calendar for the day, identifying three priority emails, pulling out action items from a long thread she missed yesterday, and showing her what meetings she has coming up, including one she needs to prepare for.

## 09:00 Working on a Client Proposal

Emma opens a shared document in Word, stored in a Teams channel connected to her project group. Without asking around, she's got access to the correct template and the latest version, with no downloads, no attachments.

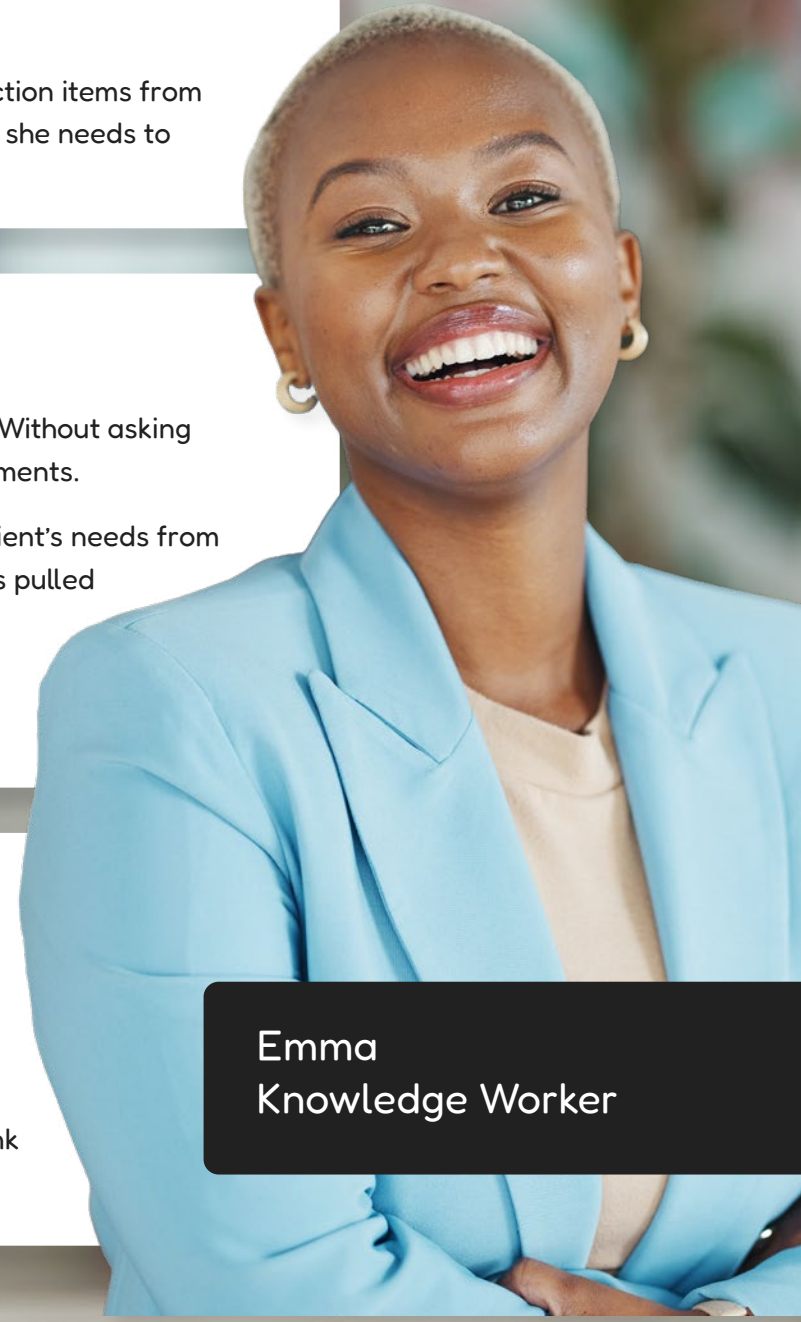
With Copilot embedded in Word, she drafts the proposal quickly, using prompts like "Summarise the client's needs from last week's meeting transcript" and "Add a paragraph on pricing based on our standard T&Cs." Data is pulled securely from related files in SharePoint with no copy/pasting, no back-and-forth emails.

Every change is saved automatically, and the document is already available to her team without needing to resend or re-save.

## 11:00 Client Meeting with Copilot in Teams

Emma joins a Teams meeting with a client. Copilot automatically transcribes the meeting, captures action items, and flags key decisions in the background so everyone can stay focused on the conversation.

After the call, the summary and next steps are waiting in the Teams thread, ready for review, with a link to the full transcript if needed. No one has to take minutes manually.



Emma  
Knowledge Worker

## Project Management and Task Updates 13:00

Using Planner integrated in Loop, Emma checks on project timelines, updates her team's backlog, and assigns a task to a colleague. With Copilot, she quickly generates a status summary, including delays, completed milestones, and upcoming risks, drawn from linked documents and timelines.

This replaces a traditional 30-minute status meeting with a 5-minute task update, and the team can respond asynchronously through Teams.

## Admin and Inbox Productivity 15:00

Using Outlook, Emma handles the remaining priority emails. Copilot suggests summaries for long messages and proposes replies based on previous conversations.

She also completes a short internal survey through Microsoft Forms, automatically sent out after her recent call with a customer, helping the business gather sentiment and improve service delivery.

## Wrap-Up and Reporting 16:30

Before the end of the day, Emma opens Power BI to review the team's performance dashboard, which draws on project data from SharePoint. With a few prompts, Copilot helps her generate talking points for her update tomorrow.

Behind the scenes, security policies ensure that company data stays protected:

- Defender monitors for any suspicious activity on her device
- Purview classifies sensitive information in the background
- Access is restricted based on her role via Entra ID

All of this happens automatically, no need for Emma to worry about compliance, threats, or local file safety. It's all covered by the Microsoft 365 ecosystem.



Emma  
Knowledge Worker



## Finding the Right Path Forward

To reiterate, no business sets out to build a maze of disconnected tools. It happens gradually, through fast growth, urgent needs, helpful recommendations, and one department solving a problem at a time.

Over time, these good intentions lead to a complex, fragmented, and often expensive tech stack.

But the good news is this: untangling the mess isn't only possible, it's often easier and more beneficial than most businesses expect, especially with the help of a trusted IT partner.

Here's what a typical consolidation journey looks like for small and mid-sized organisations:

# Finding the Right Path Forward

1

## Audit What's Being Used

Start by taking stock of your current tools. This includes:

- All apps in use across departments
- Who uses them and for what
- How much you're paying (and what's free but still in use)

Often, you'll uncover tools that are no longer needed, underused, or overlapping features with Microsoft 365.

2

## Assess Find Redundancies and Risks

Next, assess where you have:

- Duplicate functions (e.g. Slack and Teams, Dropbox and SharePoint)
- Shadow IT or tools without proper IT oversight
- Security risks due to a lack of access controls or incompatible MFA features
- Tools that hold business-critical data but have no backup or compliance safeguards

This helps prioritise where consolidation brings the most immediate business and risk-reduction value.

3

## Plan Phase Your Rollout

Avoid trying to switch everything at once. Start with high-impact wins, like communication and file sharing, or tools where adoption of Microsoft 365 equivalents is already fairly natural.

This should be a step-by-step plan to phase out legacy systems, migrate data securely, and avoid disruption to day-to-day work.

Adoption will be smoother if you don't go too wide, too fast.

# Finding the Right Path Forward

## 4

### Adopt Focus on Change Management

Successful consolidation is about people as much as platforms. Make sure to:

- Communicate clearly why changes are being made
- Provide training and internal “champions” to support team members
- Offer support and quick wins to build confidence early

When change is handled well, most teams will embrace fewer tools, not resist th

## 5

### Manage Monitor and Optimise

After rollout, continue to review usage, security settings, user access, and potential improvements.

Microsoft 365 makes this easier with built-in tools for compliance, licensing visibility, security alerts, and advanced reporting.

Consolidation isn't a one-time task – it's an ongoing opportunity to improve efficiency and reduce risk.



# Avoiding Common Pitfalls

Some of the most common issues that can undermine consolidation projects include:

- **Skipping change management** causes rollout to become messy and confusing for users.
- **Letting legacy apps linger in the background** causes parallel workflows and confusion.
- **Focusing only on short-term cost savings** without thinking strategically about long-term simplicity, security, and scalability.
- **Underestimating data migration**, especially when file structures and ownership need to be preserved.

With the right plan, these can all be avoided, and your business will be left with a streamlined, secure, and scalable stack that works better for everyone.

# How WePurpose Technology Can Help

Consolidating tools, reducing complexity, and building a modern digital workplace doesn't have to be overwhelming, and you don't have to figure it out on your own.

As a managed service provider, we work with businesses just like yours to simplify operations, strengthen security, and get the most from Microsoft 365. Whether you're starting from scratch or already partway through your journey, we'll meet you where you are and help you move forward with confidence.

Here's how we support our clients:

**Hands-on experience:** We've helped organisations in all sectors consolidate complex toolsets, eliminate redundant apps, and streamline collaboration with Microsoft 365.

**Technical expertise that matters:** From data migration and licence planning to configuring identity access, device management, and compliance tools, we help you build a secure, scalable foundation.

**Support for successful adoption:** We don't just configure systems and walk away. We help guide your people with onboarding, training, and support to ensure change sticks and tools are used to their full potential.

**Ongoing improvement:** We don't view consolidation as the end – it's just the beginning. We continue to support our clients post-rollout, helping them optimise usage, adapt to new features (like AI tools), and stay ahead of evolving risks.

If you're ready to work smarter, safer, and with fewer headaches, **we're ready to help you get there.**

