

# ACCESS <<<<<<<

By Patricia Cox

## The Future of Access

People often ask me if Access will be around in the future. Some clients don't want to develop in Access because they are concerned it will be discontinued by Microsoft. I don't have any inside information from Microsoft on this, so I tend to look at the company's behavior to make my decision about using Access. Here is what I see in the releases of Access 2010 and 2013.

### Microsoft's Investment in Access

Microsoft has spent time and money integrating Access with SharePoint Server, SQL Server, Azure, and Office 365. These are key Microsoft products that support data and Web-based performance. This integration allows for creating Web-based applications—which are a major focus of companies today—using Access.

Rapid data deployment of applications to the Web is an important focus of development work. There also are a lot of Office customers worldwide—some sources suggest almost half a billion. Access is the only database product in Office. There are also many Access developers, like myself, who

have developed applications for lots of companies. I believe Microsoft developed SQL Server with that in mind because it's a natural next step for people who know Access. SQL Server Management is an enterprise-type system, but one can see many similarities to Access. That makes for a large installed base and a natural progression for developers.

### Access 2013

Microsoft has discontinued products and features over the years. Some people will remember Microsoft's discontinuing of FoxPro a number of years ago. That program was also a database program. And while it's true that Microsoft discontinued it, that was at least partly because the company had two database products at the time and decided to focus on one of them: MS Access.

In Access 2013, Microsoft stopped supporting Access Data Projects (ADPs). If you use ADPs, you probably aren't very happy right now. As an alternative, changes were made to connect Access with SharePoint and other products as a way to support Web-based development. For developers, that's the next

thing to learn. Pivot charts and pivot tables have also been removed from Access 2013. Microsoft believes these tools are better for Excel, and I agree. I have seen others use them, but I was already using crosstab queries for that kind of work. A spreadsheet product has its uses as a tool, but a database can be a more technical tool.

Access has been around since the mid-1990s, so Microsoft has almost 20 years invested in it. The changes in Access 2013 indicate to me that Microsoft intends to continue working with Access and enabling it to connect with other data and Web tools. That suggests it will be around for a while longer.

### SharePoint

SharePoint is a Web-based development tool launched in 2001. It has primarily been used for intranet and document management applications. A 2012 poll of the Intranet Professionals LinkedIn group found that 50% of intranets are developed using some version of SharePoint. Starting with the release of SharePoint 2010, however, Microsoft began to design it to do more. It has been integrated with Office 2010,

2013, and 365. Microsoft says that SharePoint is used by 78% of *Fortune* 500 companies. Between 2006 and 2011, the company sold more than 36 million users licenses for SharePoint. Currently there are versions available at no cost, but additional versions with more capabilities are sold for a fee.

## Azure Cloud Service

Azure is a cloud service, which means it allows you to keep your data and applications in the cloud for Web-based users. Current monthly fees for the service range from \$15 a month for minimum storage (768MB) to hundreds of dollars a month to store 14GB.

## Office 365

Microsoft Office 365, which includes Access, is a subscription service for using Office. It represents a new delivery method of the software—it can't be purchased as a disk but must be downloaded. It's also made to work in the cloud, although you can store files locally if you want. The SkyDrive cloud service that Microsoft has been refining for the last several years also works with Office 365.

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## Management Strategy

For now, the evidence seems to overwhelmingly indicate that Microsoft is investing in Access to connect it with products that help companies develop both internal and Web-based applications. The bottom line is that your company should have a strategy to work with Access databases if you use them. You'll want to think about whether Office 2013 or Office 365 is the better option for you. Microsoft has some information on its site to help you work through the pros and cons.

If you work in a small company, two good strategies to consider are investing in training for a few key staff and regularly using a competent consultant. Larger companies can support a technical staff in the business area with a few individuals who have a deeper understanding of database design and system development. Invest in training for these individuals so they can regularly use the product to its potential and keep an eye on where Microsoft continues to take the product.

As the year winds down, my hope is that you have an opportunity to spend some time with your family and friends during the holiday season. In 2014 we will pickup where we left off with our Master Budget Project. **SF**

*Patricia Cox has taught Excel and Access to management accounting students and other college majors and has consulted with local area businesses to create database reporting systems since 1998. She also is a member of IMA's Madison Chapter. To send Patricia a question to address in the Access column, e-mail her at [kathrynmann@tds.net](mailto:kathrynmann@tds.net).*