

Mike Nelson – SED article

Visio 2010 – Better than 2007, But Still Has It's Bugs

Working in I.T. for over 20 years, Microsoft's Visio application has been a staple for me. Visio has matured into a great product, and it is used for not only I.T. folks, but in just about every business aspect that requires a visual flow or diagram. But even the new Visio 2010 has its issues that frustrate even the veteran user. It also introduces some good new features and fixes that are improvements over the previous versions.

Visio 2010 was released as an addition to the Office 2010 product line, along with Project 2010 and SharePoint Workspace. It has three editions, Standard, Professional, and Premium, and I choose to use the Professional version for my work. One aspect of the different editions that doesn't make sense to me is why the Professional version has integration with SharePoint for shared drawings via Visio Services, but you can only get Workflows for SharePoint with Premium (and for a \$400+ difference)? All of the SharePoint integration should be included in Professional in my opinion.

An avid user, Jon, who works for a Midwest Financial Advisor and is a Design Architect, says that the best thing about using Visio in his daily grind is that you can turn out drawings quickly from templates and create your own stencils, which is key if you have something being architected in it's infancy with vendors. He says, "But, the drawback is that it after many years and revisions, it still has issues that can make my life difficult with a project deadline approaching."

One of those issues is that for some reason, version 2010 reintroduced a famous characteristic of early 2003 versions dealing with aligning lines to grids and snapping to grid lines. This issue was fixed in the 2007 version, but has since now come back. And to add insult to injury on this one, if you open a drawing that was made in an earlier version that did not have this issue, or you spend endless hours trying to correct it, all of the lines are now off since they are snapped to the new grid. I spent 4 hours redoing lines due to this on one workspace. This is a serious issue when dealing with very intricate and detailed technical drawings, and it causes a lot of headaches for us. A [Microsoft Forum post](#) shows this is a known issue and does offer a workaround, but not a permanent fix.

Another point of contention around the new version, as well as all of the Office products in general, is the new Ribbon Bar (part of the "Fluent UI"). For many, the location of commands changed very little in previous versions, even with 2007's introduction of the bar, and it was always easy to find the command you needed quickly. The new Ribbon Bar almost seems to take a backward step in usability and usefulness for users. Trying to find settings and options is more of a task now more than ever, which to me, actually reduces productivity and increases the amount of time it takes me to complete a drawing than ever before. As you can tell, I'm not a

big fan of the Ribbon, and many other Visio faithful aren't either given the forum postings on that one subject alone. But, Microsoft stands firm on that it is here to stay, and users just have to adjust to the new "RibbonX" technology.

One of the best feature improvements that I use quite often are the ShapeSheet formulas, especially with various datacenter sizing designs. They work similar to Excel formulas and can modify the size and content of a shape based off those formulas. Now they have added IntelliSense technology for better lookups and greater extensibility.

One last issue that I've always been puzzled by with the Visio product line is around Microsoft's lack of a catalog of available stencils and the removal of the "Find Shapes" feature. They at one time marketed an Enterprise Network Tools pack that had hundreds of stencils from manufacturers, and included access of their online library, the Visio Network Center. The product ceased in 2002, and the online version slowly faded out a few years later. Now, Microsoft has the [Visio Tool Box](#) website, but no stencils are available? Just about the only places to get good quality stencils is either from the manufacturer itself, the Visio Café (which is a great resource, but some stencils are seriously outdated), or buying an expensive Visio add-on like [NetZoom](#). Why not just make them freely available and accessible within the UI or from the internet for everyone to use?

Lastly, whether you upgrade or not, you can find a ton of great information on Visio by visiting a favorite site of mine, the [Visio Guy's website](#), run by Chris Roth who is a Microsoft MVP for Visio. All in all, the new version is a good improvement over the 2007 version, even with its issues. I definitely recommend the upgrade, but I also would keep a spare 2007 install around just in case you don't want to spend a few hours fixing your lines >:-)