What is Microsoft Teams?

MS Teams is one of the most misunderstood products that has been released by Microsoft. Working with both IT Professionals and business people made us understand that the understanding and market perception of this product is wide and varied.

Microsoft now has many applications and customers struggle to know when to use what application and when much less even knowing they exist.

What about SharePoint?
The market is even more confused when you add SharePoint into the mix. Sharepoint was promised to be a "web-based" front end to many popular services that businesses use (like file sharing), but the issue ended up being it was clunky to use and even worse to manage. The other issue facing Sharepoint is the constant changes made by Microsoft to try and enhance the user experience. Often this means that customers would get used to doing things a certain way and come back after a weekend to find what worked last week has been changed.

Microsoft Teams Introduction
There are many reasons customers are looking to use MS Teams. Some users are looking for a replacement for Skype and some are looking at an efficient way to store and manage files.

Microsoft Teams is a platform to bring together many applications into a single application (interface). At its core, MS Teams consists of three core products.

Communication – Voice, messaging, meetings and video conferencing as previously provided by the likes of Skype for business.

File Sharing – As provided by SharePoint and OneDrive allows users to store files and documents.

Wiki – This is a "message board" type scenario as seen with many 3rd party products and is a way to communicate with all staff. A term coined to describe this type of functionality is an "IntraNet".

As the name would suggest you can break these core functions up into groups of users (Teams). In that way, you can have a group of managers and salespeople information separated from the relative applications and information available.

MS Teams is a platform and as with all platforms, the functionality can be extended on an "as required basis" to suit the needs of a team. The definition of a team can have multiple meanings, but the most common is a logical grouping of employees to perform a task.

A successful Teams deployment is reliant on a business analyst component. This process is about defining the processes needed by a business to operate. These processes are defined per team and usually include the process needed to successfully complete their functions.

Once the analyst component is completed, Teams uses plug-ins to help accommodate these processes.

Plug-ins are used to add functionality to the core MS Teams product. Below is a list of some of the freely available applications add-ons that Microsoft have available.

- **OneDrive** – To make file share available offline so your files can be accessed at any location.
- **Forms** – To create forms for any situation, you may have a requirement for staff leave or to make a request for a new product. Forms can be built and customised to whatever the requirement.
- **Calendar** - The calendar function, as the name would suggest adds a calendar to a specific team. For example, a calendar may be used by your company to see what staff is on leave and when.
- **Planner** – Planner is a cross between a calendar and Microsoft Project. It is used to organise work into tasks and dates and allows the assignment of those tasks to team members or external parties.
- **To Do** – To do is a task tracking application for an individual. Where Planner is about organising a project for a team, To-Do is all about organising personal tasks.
- **Shifts** – Shifts are to help organise staff displaying who is working and when. It could be especially useful if your company operates a staff revolving schedule with temporary staff. It also can be used to help offer shifts to workers.
- **Bookings** – Bookings are a way you can make your time available to 3rd parties. These bookings (if desired) can be made by both internal and external parties to your organisation or team.
- **Approvals** – Approvals are a way for your team members or staff to seek approval for a specific task. It may be an approval to spend money or to give access to a part of your organisation.
- **Walkie Talkie** – Allows the users in a team to be talked to all at once like an intercom or two-way radio.
- **Power Automate** – Is used to create automatic actions based on events happening. For example, when someone saves a file in a specific location, automation can notify team members of the addition of this new file.
- **Workflow** –Creates a flow of events for things to happen based on an event (very similar functionality to Power Automate) For example you may have created a form for staff leave. This form needs to follow a flow that may include manager sign off, HR checking to ensure the applicant has holidays available and then make an entry on a company calendar.

This is just a sample of the available applications within the Teams platform and over and above these there are many, many paid applications both from Microsoft and outside of the Microsoft family.

When talking to customers about Teams, we like to describe it as a common front end for many of the Microsoft applications and provides customers with a common user interface.

MS Teams picks up from where SharePoint failed, providing a simple, easy to use front end to all these applications that can be moulded into the applications needed to help run your business.

Logical Solutions has a defined discovery process to help customers get started on their MS Teams journey and would be interested in working with you to help define the scoping of your MS Teams project.

Please contact our offices on: helpdesk@logicalsolutions.co.nz or by phone 0800 895101.