



What's Changing in 2026?

Seems like a lot of companies are updating their features or advertising methods, effective with the new year. Some of them are optional and positive. Some are neither. Here's the news roundup to start the year.

Gmail Users get Gemini AI, On by Default for Paid accounts

The reporting is that Google mail, when used from their web page, has an artificial intelligence assistant turned on by default; that's misleading. It applies

to the paid Workspace accounts. That's not what most of you have; you generally have free Gmail accounts.

What I'm seeing in the free accounts is that you have to click the Gemini logo, top right, the four-pointed star, and then you will see an offer to "Unlock AI for everything you do in Google Workspace" and "Try at no cost." That brings up an offer for 14 days of free trial, and then \$16.80/month. The extra features read all your mail, reportedly not using it for AI training, and allow the creation of summaries, and draft replies. There's also a storage upgrade to 2 Tb of storage per user. If you don't want AI in your email, and you have the free account, no action is required.

More at CNBC:

<https://www.cnbc.com/2026/01/08/google-adds-gemini-features-to-gmail-message-summaries-proofreading-.html>

Amazon 'Buy for Me'

Amazon has created an AI shopping agent, not just for shopping on Amazon, called 'Buy for Me.' It takes orders for products on other websites.

Unfortunately, it's run by Rufus AI, isn't accurate, and does not ask permission to take orders for third parties. I expect legal battles ahead.

As a buyer of anything online, I would either choose the option to go directly to the merchant site, or just search for it myself from <https://shopping.google.com>

As a seller, there appears to be a way to tell Amazon to not index your products, by emailing branddirect@amazon.com.

More from CNBC:

<https://www.cnbc.com/2026/01/06/amazons-ai-shopping-tool-sparks-backlash-from-some-online-retailers.html>

Adobe Reader

The latest version of the free Adobe Reader is no longer usable. That's not just my opinion; I hear you out there. There are too many sales popups, and the ability to print a PDF attached to an Outlook email is broken. What to do?

- Save the PDF locally. Then open Reader, open the file, and print normally. Yes, that's around 4 extra steps.
- Or set the default for PDF files to Microsoft Edge, Google Chrome, or Firefox. They all do a reasonable job as PDF viewers and printers.
- Or Install PDF Gear. It's free and has no advertising in it, and in addition to viewing and printing PDF files, it can insert or delete pages, and make additional changes to PDF files that Adobe's free Reader can not.
<https://www.pdfgear.com>
- Completely uninstalling Adobe Reader is needed in order to prevent it interfering with using other programs to work with PDF files, especially for the email attachment problem.
- If using Thunderbird, set the option to open PDF attachments in Tools, Settings, General (and scroll down), find 'Portable Document Format (PDF)', and in the Action column, choose any of the options other than Acrobat. Firefox, also from Mozilla, has a similar option for downloads, in the same location. Set that to "Use Windows default application."



Microsoft Office's Latest Name

Visit <https://office.com> and take a look. What was Microsoft Office, and then was Office 365, and then Microsoft 365, is now showing up as 'Microsoft 365 Copilot.' Don't let them confuse you; Microsoft has a long history of odd trademark gymnastics. I suspect that this trademark usage will evolve again before 2026 is out.

More here:

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/the-microsoft-365-app-transition-to->

the-microsoft-365-copilot-app-22eac811-08d6-4df3-92dd-77f193e354a5

As before, remember that Copilot (free in Windows) may use information entered into the app for training, but Copilot (as part of the Microsoft 365 subscription, by whatever name) does not use internal information for training. Or put another way, free Copilot that's bolted into Microsoft Explorer is mining your content, but paid Copilot that's built into Outlook (and Word, Excel, etc) does not harvest data. As always, if it's free, YOU are the product.



Memory

Memory pricing has more than tripled since September, and drive prices have doubled. Nearly all production of memory chips has gone to the expensive chips demanded for AI data centers. Projections are that prices will settle in 1-2 years. So what to do?

- Buy new computers with 8 Gb or 16 Gb of memory, and plan to upgrade later. Ask about memory sockets: there should be an empty memory socket or pair available for an upgrade later.
- New computers should have 512 Gb of storage, minimum. Ask about space for a second drive, usually configured as D:, for when prices drop, and when you need the storage.

Windows

Windows 10 should be either replaced or off of networks and off of the internet by now; security patches ended October 14, 2025. Windows 11 should be

version 25H2, or can still be 24H2 until October of 2025. Upgrade planning and triggering Windows 11 upgrades remotely are free; call for assistance. The Windows command, from the Start (logo) menu, that identifies the Windows version, is 'winver'.



About that 'Paperless' New Year's Resolution

If you plan to never buy another file cabinet, the first step is to stop printing new pages. The best approach is to print to PDF, using the Windows 11 PDF printer selection. And then if you need to combine PDF documents, the usual choice is Adobe Acrobat Standard or Pro. Those are subscription-only products now, billed monthly forever. Adobe gets expensive for an entire office.

Here's another option: NAPS2, also known as 'Not Another PDF Scanner.' NAPS2 is very useful for bulk scanning and combining PDF files with paper documents--you can scan extra pages into a PDF, and stop adding to paper files. NAPS2 is open source; a donation for NAPS2 is requested on the site, but it is not tied to a specific computer with a license key.

NAPS2 can import existing PDF files, and then combine them into a single document. Or delete pages, rotate pages, or change the order of pages.

Download NAPS2 from <https://naps2.com>

Always download software directly from the publisher's own site, and no other location.

To join a document, choose Import from the main screen, and pull in each document you need. Then drag the pages into the correct order, and then click Save PDF.

NAPS2 has powerful automatic naming options for repeated tasks. For bulk scanning and auto-naming, create a profile, click 'Enable Auto Save' and click the settings link. The filenames are created with placeholders for dates, page numbers, and incrementing numbers--there are buttons to insert each of those items. For example, to setup auto-naming that looks like "2026-01-12-page-1", fill in a path for saving, followed by "\$ (YYYY)-\$(MM)-\$(DD)-page-\$(n).pdf".



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