

## Microsoft Review Feature Out of Control

Beginning with Office XP, Microsoft added a new collaboration feature called *Reviewing*. This *Reviewing* feature greatly extended the *Track Changes* feature in Microsoft Word, and it now applies to Excel and PowerPoint as well. While this appears to be a very useful feature, *Reviewing* is dangerous and very difficult to control. Only the originator has the ability to disable the feature and remove the tracked changes that have been collected. Unfortunately, it is often difficult or impossible to determine who originated the *Reviewing* cycle because Microsoft enables the *Reviewing* feature without warning the user!

By default, Outlook will enable the *Reviewing* feature any time a Word, Excel or PowerPoint file is sent by email. Even if you don't use Outlook, someone else who has had access to the file may have initiated a *Reviewing* cycle unintentionally. *Reviewing* is not effected by renaming the file using the "Save As" approach. In fact, it is extremely difficult to remove. Even Microsoft has not been able to resolve the problem. In a developer's newsgroup, John Langhans from Microsoft Corporation at first denied that this was a Microsoft problem:

"This sounds very much like an issue that we are trying to understand the root cause for at Microsoft. We have seen two presentations where a mysterious 'hidden' Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation OLE object was on the Slide Master and we suspect that there is some rogue add-in in the wild that is causing this."

This was no rogue add-in. It was Microsoft's built-in *Reviewing* feature. A few posts later, Mr. Langhans acknowledged it was a Microsoft problem:

"We just discovered where this was coming from (oops). When you send a document for review (using the Send for Review feature) we place an original copy of the presentation as a hidden OLE object so that the reviewing feature has something to compare with in order to know what is changed and what isn't changed."

Microsoft's suggestion to resolve this user's problem did not work for this user because they did not originate the *Reviewing* cycle. To which Mr. Langhans then replied:

"I'm checking to see if there's a way, through the reviewing UI to remove the embedded object (since in this scenario the "End Review" option would not be available)."

That was in November 2003. Mr. Langhans has not posted to this newsgroup since.

More recently, we attempted to get some information on the *Reviewing* feature. After several exchanges, Mr. Bill Dilworth from the Microsoft Valued Professional (MVP) PowerPoint Team told us:

"You may be right, and are beyond me on this one. One of the other VBA people may be able to better advise you."

This is a perfect example of technology out of control. Yesterday's technology has become today's problem. Unfortunately, it is not a well known problem, and Microsoft does not appear to be interested in either identifying or solving the *Reviewing* issue.

SRS Technologies has developed a robust capability to end the *Reviewing* cycle and remove the *Reviewing* data from a Microsoft Office file. This capability will be included in the first release of our Electronic Document Review System (EDRS) that will be available by the end of this year. Our EDRS has been designed from the ground up to meet the Government's stringent 100% reliable human review requirement for transferring electronic documents to a lower classification level. This process is also known as *Trusted Downloading*. SRS has developed considerable expertise in this area. Please contact us if you would like more information about our Electronic Document Security program, or if you are interested in our EDRS software.

Please feel free to forward this message to other Government personnel you believe would benefit from this information.

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