

# MS OneNote: A Gem in the Rough

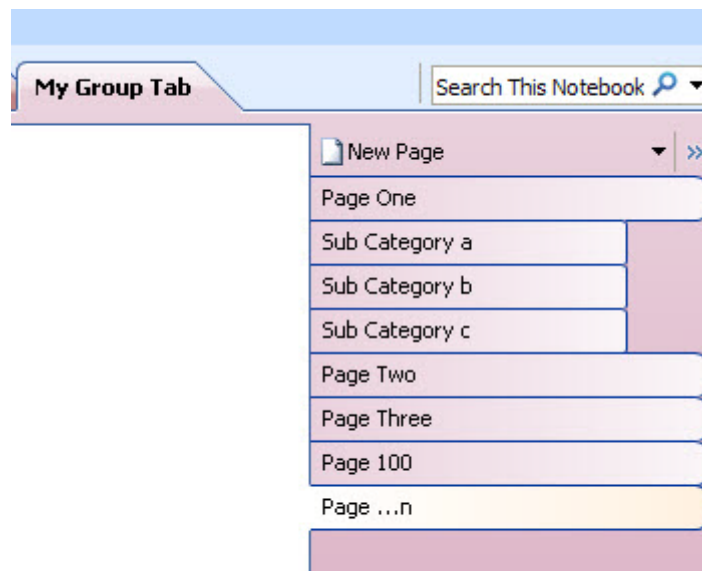
(Microsoft OneNote: A Gem in the Rough)

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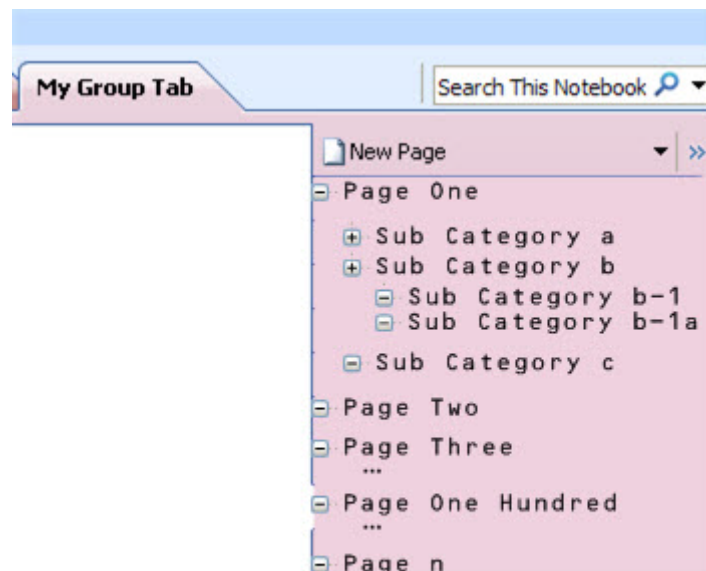
I have had a love-hate relationship with Microsoft products for the last 25 years. From their DOS Edlin editor to their horrible unintuitive support of bullet lists in Word, to their clunky Outlook application, to their Visual Studio tools which are superb, Microsoft is somewhat hard to understand. The best product they ever acquired was Visio and I still use that product daily. They also have what I call “A Gem in the Rough” and that is Microsoft’s OneNote.

After installing OneNote, the first time I used it I was excited. I, however, quickly found myself saying out loud – “This should do this” and “This should do that.” The problem was the application quickly hit its boundaries with me and that was very frustrating. I suppose I wanted to use it in some ways like a knowledge base. I certainly wanted to use it as a productivity tool. But, I found that it was like using a tack hammer to build a house.



**Existing OneNote Group/Page Structure**

When I first saw the sneak peak of the Office OneNote 2010 screens published on the web, my heart stopped – not from excitement – but from total disappointment. How could Microsoft’s product managers for OneNote be this incompetent? The number one weakest feature of OneNote is its lack of a collapsible, sortable, tree structure with multiple views for navigation. The Page and Subpage navigation is something a high school programmer would have created for their first application. The product has so much potential but yet they hand us more of the same. The only thing Microsoft seems able to do is to hire graphic artists to come up with new pastel palettes for their applications. How lame. No – Lame is too nice of a word to describe what is coming out of Redmond. Who are the people that are making these decisions?



**Proposed OneNote Group/Page Structure**

The other major problem with OneNote is it becomes a bloated pig (without lipstick) once you start dumping media into the pages. It often creates a swap file several gigabytes in size on my machine and basically prevents me from running other applications concurrently. The product needs to be a 64-bit application with the ability to run platforms supporting 16GB, 32GB, or even more RAM. Come on Microsoft – can’t you do better than this?

Putting my complaining on the back burner, OneNote has a lot of potential. It just isn't a workhorse product yet. I sat down and documented several hundred features that I would like to see incorporated into the product. I will discuss those in future articles. One of the most basic changes that I would like to see implemented is for a full tree structure to replace the page and sub-page tabs to the right of the OneNote Groups. See the images for an example of this. Such an interface would allow for the creation of hundreds of entries which could be easily grouped and organized in a logical manner. Color coding and small icons could also be used in the tree structure. I would also like to have the ability to have such elements automatically sort themselves. If I were to add Apples, Peaches, and Oranges to the list names, it would be nice if it would automatically sort, as a user settable option, to Apples, Oranges, and Peaches. My biggest desire for this feature is for the entry and management of many entries. I would like to literally add hundreds if not thousands of pages to any given category. OneNote simply can't handle such entries effectively and it certainly has no support for deeply nested branches. Perhaps that is why OneNote is only an IBM Lotus Notes want-a-be for now.

On the bright side, there seems to be a growing number of OneNote add-on products appearing. Hopefully in time the application will become a powerful tool.

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