Productivity tools: Microsoft OneNote Mobile for Android product review

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As CSOFT’s Senior Translation Tools Strategist, Uwe Muegge is not only an expert in the fields of terminology management and translation tools, but also has an avid interest in software and tools that help boost work efficiency and productivity. In today’s world where we are constantly bombarded with information and ideas, Uwe takes a moment to shed light on how he manages today’s information-driven work environment—on the go.

Do you have an Android smartphone or tablet? Are you still waiting for the day when you can finally leave your laptop behind in the office when taking notes during meetings? Don’t you think your next great idea deserves something better than a napkin for jotting it down? I just returned from the first conference where I didn’t lug my laptop to any event and didn’t take any notes on paper. And yet, I have a treasure trove of rich, well-organized, fully searchable electronic notes that I can access from both my laptop and my mobile device.

Why I am a big fan of OneNote 2010

I am a knowledge worker. Every day I learn about a new tool, process, event or opportunity that I want to keep a record of for future reference. I have been using OneNote on my PC for several years, the primary incentive being that OneNote is part of Microsoft’s Office suite. The primary features of OneNote 2010 are:

- Store many different types of information in one place, e.g. documents, media, typed and handwritten notes, drawings, etc.
- Capture a snapshot of dynamic information, such as webpages
- Organize information hierarchically in notebooks, sections, pages, and subpages
- Use efficient tools for adding information, such as the “Send to OneNote” printer driver and the Screen Clipping tool
- Find information quickly, as documents are indexed

In other words, OneNote helps users enter, organize, and retrieve user-generated and published data in an effective and very efficient manner.

![Sample of OneNote Office 2010 notebooks organized into sections, pages and subpages](image)
How SkyDrive changed the way I work

Many may be aware of the fact that Microsoft SkyDrive offers users 7GB of free cloud storage space (more space is available for paying subscribers), but did you also know that you can save your Word, Excel, and PowerPoint files directly from within Office (File > Save & Send > Save to Web) onto SkyDrive? This is also true for OneNote 2010.

In fact, the OneNote SkyDrive web app can be synced with OneNote Office, which means that an addition or change made in one environment automatically updates the other. I have been a very happy user of this system, which has, among other things, served as my primary backup solution for Office documents.

One of the most compelling features of OneNote Mobile is the fact that it syncs with OneNote SkyDrive, and, if properly set-up, with your desktop version of OneNote. With OneNote Mobile, there is no need to bring a laptop to meetings or presentations; you can take notes in OneNote Mobile and these notes are automatically uploaded to your desktop version of OneNote the next time you sync the device to your desktop. Additionally, you can also display PowerPoint shows and share Word and Excel documents straight from your Android device using SkyDrive without any third-party application.

OneNote Mobile for Android: A Road Warrior’s New Best Friend

Last week, I attended a four-day conference (Moodle Moot), an e-learning event, and I exclusively used OneNote Mobile on my Android phone for note taking. Did OneNote get the job done? Absolutely! As the screenshot below illustrates, OneNote Mobile lets you create rich notes that can include bulleted and numbered lists, as well as check boxes. Adding photos is easy with the Quick Photo button: You can insert a shot you take with your device camera or pick an existing image from the gallery. If you are using a tablet, you can even add handwritten comments to your photos. The user interface of OneNote Mobile is really intuitive, and it took me less than five minutes from installation to creating my first page in OneNote Mobile.

As OneNote Mobile syncs with OneNote SkyDrive, you can also access and display all of the notes you created in the other versions of OneNote. Best of all, OneNote Mobile also works in offline mode, so you can display your OneNote pages even when you are not connected to the web.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that OneNote Mobile is capable of displaying richer notes than the Android application can create. The screenshot below shows a page created in OneNote Office that includes formatting features that are not available in OneNote Mobile.
For my purposes, having only a few formatting options available in OneNote Mobile worked well, as all formatting features were easily accessible. And in those cases where I wanted more structure, I simply added those features after the session using OneNote SkyDrive or OneNote Office.

For faster text entry, use a Bluetooth keyboard

Unless you are a texting wizard, using the on-screen keyboard that comes with Android for entering anything other than simple to-do lists is probably not a good idea. I even found the otherwise impressive handwriting recognition feature of Android 4 on my tablet insufficient for keeping up with any but the slowest of presenters. But a folding Bluetooth keyboard turned OneNote Mobile on my Android into a note-taking power tool. I have tested several other folding keyboards before settling on the Verbatim Bluetooth folding keyboard. Initially, I was looking for a smaller keyboard but the other keyboards I tested didn’t look to support typing on my lap. Also, I’m a fairly fast touch typist and the smaller keys of the other keyboards just didn’t feel comfortable. The Verbatim keyboard also took some getting used to—the biggest issue for me is that I often hit the up-key instead of the right shift key. But due to its bigger size, the Verbatim keyboard allows me to type with my hands in a more natural position. Plus, its locking mechanism makes the Verbatim mobile keyboard the natural choice for users who often have to type away from a desk.

Is OneNote Mobile worth the money?

OneNote Mobile is certainly not the only note-taking app available for the Android platform. Evernote, simplenote, and Tomdroid are veritable competitors in this field. In fact, all these other applications offer more advanced formatting options when entering notes on an Android mobile device. What I like most about OneNote Mobile is the fact that it is fully integrated in Microsoft SkyDrive. And SkyDrive not only automatically syncs OneNote Mobile with the OneNote web app and OneNote Office application, but also provides mobile access to my other Office documents. In addition, OneNote Mobile has the core features I need for mobile note taking, and its simple user interface makes for very fast text entry. And finally, the price of OneNote Mobile can’t be beat: it’s free if you stay below the 500-notes limit (one-time fee of $4.99 for unlimited notes).

Uwe Moegele has more than 15 years of experience in the translation and localization industry, having worked in leadership functions on both the vendor and buyer side. He has published numerous articles on translation tools and processes, and taught computer-assisted translation and terminology management courses at the college level in both the United States and Europe. Uwe has been with CSOFT since 2008, and currently serves as Senior Translation Tools Strategist for North America.