Microsoft acknowledges Office 2016-OS X El Capitan crashes but lacks ETA for fix
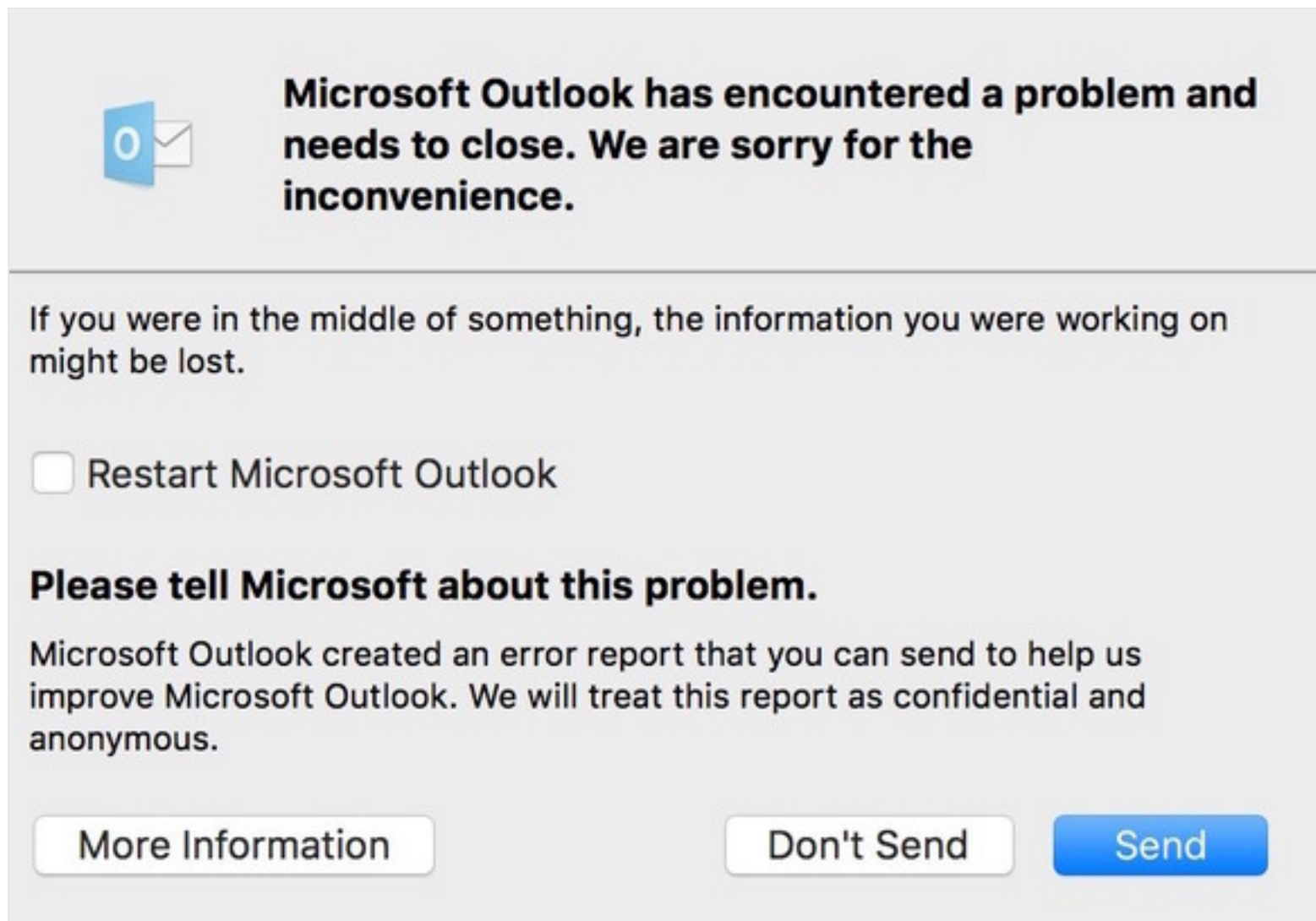
Microsoft has acknowledged that users of its Office for Mac 2016 application suite are encountering frequent crashes and implied that it's working on a fix, but offered no timeline for delivering an update.

In an emailed statement, a Microsoft spokeswoman said the company is looking into the problem.

"We know that some users may be experiencing issues with Office 2016 for Mac running on El Capitan," the statement read. "We are actively investigating the matter with Apple. Until there is a fix, we recommend people install the latest updates to Office 2016 for Mac using Microsoft AutoUpdate."

Faisal Jeelani, a Microsoft senior program manager, chimed in on a company support thread with a similar message. "We are aware of the issue with Outlook 2011 on El Capitan and of Office 2016 on El Capitan," Jeelani wrote, referring to an already-admitted problem with Outlook 2011 -- the email client bundled with Office for Mac 2011 -- as well as the crashes afflicting users of the newer Office for Mac 2016.

"We are working on a fix for 2011, and for 2016, we are working closely with Apple to resolve this issue as soon as possible," Jeelani wrote. "Unfortunately, we do not have any timelines for either fix, please stay

tuned and thank you for your understanding."

Apple released OS X 10.11, aka El Capitan, on Sept. 30. Although reports of Office for Mac application crashes preceded the official El Capitan release by months -- the first message on the thread was posted July 25, about two weeks after Apple seeded the first public beta -- the volume soared as people upgraded their Macs to El Capitan this week.

The support thread where Jeelani's comment appeared was the longest, by far, of those on Microsoft's support site discussing the crash problems. As of late Friday, the thread had logged nearly 21,000 views and contained more than 200 messages, both extremely high numbers for the forum dedicated to Office for Mac 2016.

It remains unclear whether Microsoft's or Apple's code -- or a combination -- is responsible for Office 2016's crashes. Because both the company statement and Jeelani's message mentioned that Microsoft is working or investigating *with Apple*, one interpretation is that Microsoft believes the problem originates with Apple. Another may be that Microsoft simply needs more information from Apple to understand why Office applications are falling down and can't get up.

On the support thread, some frustrated users had a plague-on-both-your-houses attitude. "Beta testers have been reporting these crashes for several months," said Gerald Wildon. "It's inexcusable for both Microsoft and Apple to get to this point of public release of both products (OS X El Cap & Office 2016) with no resolution."

Others thought they knew whom to hold accountable. "You cannot blame Apple for this. It is down to Microsoft to test and update their own software to run on updated operating systems," wrote Frank Nicklin on the same thread Friday. "How would Apple have access to the development code for a Microsoft product?"

Still others used satire to make their point.

"If only Apple had let you get an advanced copy of El Capitan to test your products with before Apple released their new OS," said Ed Hansberry in a Thursday reply to Jeelani's message. "It is a shame they don't have a program to allow that sort of collaboration so developers can get ready for the big day."

Apple is in the process of testing OS X 10.11.1, El Capitan's first update, and has handed a preview to both developers and public beta testers, with the latest beta issued to the latter on Thursday. *Computerworld* installed 10.11.1 on multiple Macs Friday and although Office 2016 did not crash during that day's work cycle, application failures have been intermittent enough in the past to make any judgment about the El Capitan update premature.

At the moment, Microsoft has no answer. But one commentator on the support forum did. "I mean this with all sincerity: The best way to use Office on a Mac right now is to run Windows Office on a virtual machine," said Juls Sark.