



If Vista spoiled the view, the outlook for Windows 7 is brighter

If you are a PC user you will probably know Windows Vista was not the most popular operating system that Microsoft has launched. As part of the natural progression and evolution, Microsoft is shortly releasing a new operating system (OS) called Windows 7, which will be available from 22nd October 2009. However, don't worry if your organisation is a recent purchaser of Vista, you will be able to upgrade at a favourable cost, although check with your supplier in the first instance.

92% totally new

Windows 7 shares many innovations from Vista's core technology but is clearly designed to address most of the criticisms levelled at its predecessor. However, if you expect it to be a small step forward from Vista you would be wrong as 92% of the code is totally new. Additionally, (and unusually) for the first time in Microsoft's history a new release of Windows actually requires less computing power than the last one. In fact Windows 7 could be described as 'compact and efficient', running happily on a variety of PCs from entry level laptops to performance workstations.

In Windows 7, there are many small refinements as well as a few big ones and generally, it aims to make everyday computing faster, simpler and easier – improving productivity along the way. One of Vista's main challenges was that the OS it replaced (Windows XP) was very stable and software compatibility wasn't a problem. Therefore users typically didn't want to change. This user preference is catered for in Windows 7 by a new feature called 'XP Mode', which allows a user to start Windows XP (by clicking an icon) and running it as a virtual OS within Windows 7. For users of older, Windows XP specific applications, this is particularly useful and allows you to keep using those handy applications that every business has, but cannot always upgrade.

There is also another nice touch that will help with security - a brand new feature called 'BitLocker to Go' which now allows you to encrypt information saved to a removable drive (e.g. USB Stick) - making USB stick loss less of an issue (are you listening Local Authorities?).

Making things simple

While on the subject of security, many users require remote access, which traditionally has been through a technology called a VPN. Windows 7 comes with a feature called 'DirectAccess' which greatly simplifies complicated VPN configuration.

Other enhancements worth a mention are Home Group and Device Stage.

HomeGroup

A new easy accessibility feature of Windows 7 is HomeGroup. Once set up, HomeGroup allows Windows 7 users to easily share data and devices between computers when disconnected from the main company network. It makes working at different offices (or a home office) easy in that a laptop will automatically 'join' a HomeGroup network without any further configuration, and be able to use all listed peripherals once the HomeGroup password has been entered.

Device Stage

Windows 7 now offers extended support for peripheral devices such as cameras, printers, and mobile phones by using 'Device Stage'. Device Stage or the 'Devices and Printers' icon displayed on your Windows 7 (computer) desktop, offers a single place to view and manage tasks for each device, particularly useful when troubleshooting, and many times faster and more user-friendly, than trying to locate and then delve into the individual device manager properties.

Too many to cover

Obviously due to limitations on space I have only covered a few key innovations Windows 7 contains. Some are more gimmicky like the aero shake (a mouse shake-activated action – think Nintendo Wii), while others such as the thumbnail views of open windows listed horizontally across the screen (a bit like the Apple Mac taskbar) - speed up use, but I firmly believe this is a huge step forward for users, businesses, productivity and Microsoft.

For those with more of an interest in how technology will continue to develop, Windows 7 really is the 'next generation' of client operating system software and it will provide increased usability, functionality and performance for both home and business users. I fully expect there to be great interest in this OS, as there is considerable pent up demand for a new, feature rich, client operating system from Microsoft, that delivers on its promises!

Windows 7 system requirements*

- 1 GHz or faster processor
- 2 GB RAM
- 20 GB available hard disk space

*Certain features require access to the Internet and in some cases additional hardware. You cannot upgrade directly from Microsoft XP.

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