

# Windows™ Version Alternatives CHOICES

In early January Microsoft's CEO Steve Balmer provided a sneak peak at Windows 7, the successor to Windows Vista®. Vowing the best version of Windows® ever, Balmer promised an easier-to-use and faster operating system for PCs. The exact release date has not been set, but it is expected to be sometime in 2010.

A beta version of Windows 7 is now available for download. This copy is not intended for everyday use and should be loaded only on a spare PC. The software will expire in about six months of download.

Many IT departments and individual users have skipped using Windows Vista (released January 2007) mainly because of backwards compatibility issues and increased hardware requirements. Even so, Microsoft has sold 180 million copies of Windows Vista, much of it coming preinstalled on new PCs. Some users have even delayed purchasing new machines because they come with Windows Vista. Others have opted to purchase systems with Windows XP preinstalled, with an upgrade to Windows Vista available. This option can cost over \$150, as much as 25 percent of the total purchase price.

But, is Windows Vista really that bad? It depends upon user requirements and the amount of older hardware/software involved in the environment. Some older devices, such as printers and scanners, may not have the necessary drivers to function with Windows Vista. Hewlett Packard, for example, recommends hardware upgrade for some of its older models to newer ones that offer Windows Vista drivers.

Some software vendors have either been unwilling, or unable, to modify their products to run under Windows Vista. This can be the largest obstacle in a hotel environment, as some PMS, sales and marketing, engineering and other industry-specific packages are not compatible with Windows Vista. Browser-based systems that require no other client software on a workstation, should operate properly under Windows Vista, however.

Windows Vista does require significantly more computing power than does Windows XP. However, newer systems usually come with the necessary power, or, can be upgraded (especially with more random access memory) inexpensively.

There are advantages to Windows Vista over Windows XP. The networking features are easier to use and more secure. A program called SuperFetch allows programs to load faster at start up. Windows Vista also allows a USB flash disk to become a memory card, thus allowing more RAM without actually upgrading the memory.

An updated graphical user interface dubbed Aero can make the computer easier to operate. Other features of Windows Vista include:

- A shadow copy makes automatic backups of files and folders on the specified hard drive.

- Reliability and performance monitor can fine tune and monitor systems resources such as the disk drives, network connections, memory and other operations.

- Parental controls that restrict access to certain Web sites and can restrict downloading, which can be very useful in business center environments to restrict guest access to certain functions.

With all the new features available, there is still reluctance to use Windows Vista in a business environment, even though some of the software incompatibilities have been remedied and most new hardware can accommodate the increased computing requirements.

Some IT departments have even gone to the extent of downgrading pre-loaded Windows Vista systems to Windows XP. The problem with this approach is some new computers do not have drivers (the software that makes devices function with the computer) for Windows XP. The lack of drivers might force technicians to install other hardware, such as sound cards, memory card readers, etc., in a new computer just to get such devices to work properly.

Users should not delay purchases of new computers just because of Windows Vista, especially laptops made for travel. Even if the property's application software is incompatible, the applications can still be run remotely over the Internet using services such as GoToMyPC or LOG ME IN. Since these applications become browser based using these services, there are no compatibility issues.

While older printer and other peripherals drivers may not work with Windows Vista, there may be built-in drivers that do, or updates available over the Web.

Some IT professionals have taken the position of waiting on the newest version of Windows, dubbed Windows 7 before migrating from Windows XP. But that approach has potential drawbacks. Windows 7 is an incremental upgrade to Windows Vista, which means it supposedly will have full backwards compatibility to Windows Vista, not older versions such as Windows XP. So the same compatibility issues that exist today between Windows XP and Windows Vista may also exist with Windows 7.

Microsoft has not been very successful with new releases as far as presenting a relatively bug-free version in early additions of product releases. The stability of the newest version is uncertain at this time.

Windows XP will be supported by Microsoft until 2014. Windows Vista is not a bad alternative if the software used in an installation can run on it, but wait awhile on Windows 7 until the initial bugs are worked out.

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## FEATURES OF WINDOWS™ VISTA

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