

No Longer Over The Horizon: VISTA!

So it's been ballyhooed to death. So it's two years late. So nothing Microsoft ever produces works the first time out of the gate. Do we sound cynical? We're not alone – much of the world is warily regarding the release of Vista, the latest Windows operating system.

The world has gotten skeptical about Microsoft and its products in a BIG way. Witness this quote, from Mark Harris in *Electronic Times*

"Like medieval peasants, computer manufacturers and millions of users are locked in a seemingly eternal lease with their evil landlord, who comes around every two years to collect billions of dollars of taxes in return for mediocre services"

We have much the same feeling, have written an article called "*Lawyers: Shackled to Microsoft?*" Sad to say, shackled we are, because our clients are too, and we are all going to have to surrender once again to Microsoft – what little freedom we have is determining "when" we will surrender. More on that later

If you thought Mark Harris was unhappy, listen to the venerable Robert X. Cringely, who posted this on www.infoworld.com on October 27, 2006.

"Even as Halloween looms, few things are scarier than Microsoft readying a new OS for release. Vista is likely to arrive at hardware OEMs before Turkey Day. But some Cringesters report problems getting their gear to work with Release Candidate 2 (the "final final" version), and Microsoft has yet to conjure up a hardware compatibility list. Security vendors scream that Redmond hasn't provided the APIs they need to plug their software in to Vista, while some beta testers say RC2 still contains more bugs than an HP boardroom meeting. Vista remains "on track," says spokesperson-du-jour Austin Stewart, although exact ship dates will be determined by "product quality." Just how bad will Vista have to be for Microsoft to miss its January 2007 retail ship date? That's too frightening to even contemplate."

OK – they finally got Vista released. Does this mean that you should immediately upgrade? Is the new version of Windows worth the money and aggravation? Buckle your seatbelt as we hit the highlights and concerns of the latest Windows operating system. Bumpy road or not, most of us will travel it – at this point, 90% of the world is running on a Windows OS. Misery loves company and we sure do have company on a global basis!

Don't have a clue what Vista is? Wake up, Rip Van Winkle. Vista is the latest Windows operating system to be released from the hallowed halls of Microsoft. Development began five years ago and the release date has been postponed several times. Wall Street placed tremendous pressure on Microsoft to release the product although several of the

Redmond developers wanted to take more time and release a quality product. Bottom line... Vista is here.

The major focus of Vista is vastly improved security. Bill Gates pledged that security would become a #1 concern and the developers took his pledge to heart. With such a large install base and constant attacks on previous Windows versions, Microsoft has finally gotten serious about securing its operating system. The kernel (heart) of the operating system was so tight that the antivirus and security vendors complained to Microsoft that their products wouldn't work with Vista unless access to the kernel was allowed. Symantec was the most vocal of the vendors and has repeatedly suggested that Microsoft establish a new certification model that will certify legitimate vendors who seek to extend the Windows Vista kernel. Microsoft buckled and the security vendors now have access to the kernel of the operating system. The jury is still out, but some say that opening the kernel exposes the operating system to external attack and subsequent compromise. Our own view is that the highwaymen of the modern era will find a way – staying ahead of the vagabonds is probably wishful thinking – and if only Microsoft has access to the kernel, we're right back in antitrust territory. Been there, done that.

Before we go down the road of selecting which of the six Vista versions may be right for you, let's look at what is NOT in Vista. Certain features that exist in Windows XP will not be in Vista. Windows Messenger will not be included. So what? There are plenty of other instant message programs out there to use. NetMeeting, the desktop sharing and video conferencing client, is being replaced with Windows Meeting Space.

There are many more additions to Windows Vista and we'll just hit a few of the highlights. Vista has more multimedia capability than its predecessor. Vista has the ability to manipulate and organize your digital photos and rip music from CDs without additional software. Windows Media Center in Vista and your Xbox 360 can now integrate. You do own an Xbox 360 don't you? If not, you can always borrow your children's or talk the neighbor's kids into a little loaner time. For the real diehards in the Young Lawyer's Section, Windows Media 11 is deeply integrated with URGE, a new digital music service from MTV. Speech recognition is also built into Vista. You'll be able to dictate documents and even launch applications with the new capabilities. Finally an excuse to talk to your computer. Scotty, beam me home.

Windows performance is also improved with new features like Sleep, Windows SuperFetch, Windows ReadyBoost and Windows ReadyDrive. Sleep is a new power state that combines the speed of Standby and the data protection of Hibernate. SuperFetch understands which applications you use most and preloads those applications into memory for faster launch and retrieval. Windows ReadyBoost lets you add memory to your computer without opening the case and permanently inserting additional memory modules. ReadyBoost accesses flash memory devices, such as a USB thumb drive, by adding the memory to the system memory pool. This additional memory augments the installed memory and can be removed at any time without causing data loss. However, when the additional memory is removed, system performance will reduce back to the original level of performance. Windows ReadyDrive enables Windows Vista computers

to take advantage of new disk drives called Hybrid hard drives. Hybrid hard disks are a new type of disk that contains integrated non-volatile flash memory. ReadyDrive allows for faster boot of the operating system, quicker recovery from hibernation mode and lower power consumption.

So which version is right for you? The Windows Vista lineup consists of six versions. Three versions are for intended for consumers, two versions for businesses and one version for emerging markets. The versions are titled Windows Vista Starter, Windows Vista Home Basic, Windows Vista Home Premium, Windows Vista Business, Windows Vista Enterprises and Windows Vista Ultimate. Windows Vista Starter is the version targeted for emerging markets and won't be (legally) available in the United States. This version is specifically designed for lower-cost computers and entry-level PC users. Commentators state that you'll be better off running Windows 98 instead of the Starter version primarily because Vista Starter can only access 256 MB of RAM and can only run three applications at one time. Vista Home Basic is better, but not much of a home operating system either - forget about using it in a business setting. Home Basic won't work in domain or Active Directory based networks. Vista Home Premium is a good choice for home usage. It contains the new Aero Glass (translucent, 3D rendering) interface and DVD Video Authoring and Media Center support. Consider Vista Home Premium to be on par with Windows XP Home. Home Premium is still crippled (like XP Home) in that it doesn't support domain or Active Directory LANs, which is a requirement for most businesses. Next up is Vista Business, which will be the primary version for business usage. It includes a lot of the features missing from the home versions. Vista Enterprise is only available to those who purchase SA (Software Assurance) contracts, which contain a hefty price tag all by themselves. There doesn't seem to be any worthwhile differences between the Business and Enterprise versions except for the higher cost of Enterprise due to the SA requirement, so beware when the vendors start pushing the Enterprise version. Vista Enterprise does give you Virtual PC, where you can run up to four operating systems on a single computer. While it is a nice feature, not many businesses will have a real need for the virtual PC ability unless they're doing software developing. Finally, Vista Ultimate is the granddaddy of them all. It includes all of the features of the home and business versions in a single version.

Prices for the Vista versions are consistent with their functionality. Discounts are available through certain channels, but general retail prices are as follows. Vista Home Basic is \$199, Vista Home Premium is priced at \$239, Vista Business is \$299 retail and Vista Ultimate is a hefty \$399. Upgrade pricing is also available for each of the Vista versions.

Should you even bother with the upgrade to Vista, especially considering that the cost (license and hardware requirements)? In recent surveys, 39% said they would upgrade to Vista within a year of release, although the vast majority are targeting at least 12-18 months following the release to upgrade. Most will upgrade as part of their normal technology refresh cycle when computers get replaced. Info World reports that 52.5% of those surveyed have no current plans to even deploy Vista. Most folks will probably wait until the release of the first service pack before upgrading to Vista. That will give

Microsoft time to flush out the majority of bugs. It will also allow the application developers time to make sure their products will run on Vista. As April 2007, less than 1% of people have upgraded to Vista – most of them because they bought new computers, not by choice.

As always, we will advise our clients to sit tight and let others do the bleeding if they want to be on the leading edge. When Service Pack One is out, six months (at least) have passed, and all primary applications are known to successfully run on Vista, then it may be time to make the plunge. Few things are apt to be worse than operating system software designed by a company with a monopoly. But we've all been here before – where Bill Gates goes, the vast majority of us will, reluctantly, follow.

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