

Should your office upgrade to Windows Vista? An emphatic No!

Vista is a bust. It's a dog with too many fleas.



Mortimer

By Michael Mortimer

Recently a colleague informed me that he intended to replace his aging notebook. Included in his questions was whether or not he should get Windows Vista on his new notebook computer. I told him, "NO!"

Bottom line first

In my view, there are six reasons why you should avoid the Vista operating system (OS), and I contend that any one of the reasons is a sufficient reason to not upgrade. I will discuss them in detail below, but here's a short list:

- **Time:** It takes a lot of YOUR time to upgrade from XP to Vista;
- **Money:** It can be expensive to upgrade. Installing Vista on an existing computer costs way more than the average $100 retail cost of Vista Home Premium;
- **Obsolete:** Upgrade to Vista and you may lose full or partial use of XP-based computer peripherals (printers, scanners), notebook or desktop components (video or audio card) and dated law office software, all that work fine with XP, but are no longer supported by manufacturers and developers to work with Vista;
- **Blue screen of death**: The Vista operating system has been reported by many to be buggy. While not as bad as the numerous occurrences of the blue screen of death from the Windows 98 era, with Vista, programs and systems still frequently freeze up requiring one to close the program or reboot. End result, you lose all work; and
- **Vista is outdated:** Microsoft has "Windows 7" in beta testing. (There are over three million beta testers, including yours truly.) Windows 7 will replace Vista. Microsoft projects that Windows 7 will be on the market in 2010. Whether or not that happens, the fact is, Microsoft is "cheating" on Vista with a new mistress. That speaks volumes about what even Microsoft thinks about Vista.
- **Not better than XP:** Windows XP with service pack three (SP3) is an extremely stable program and works very well with just about all law office computers and software. There is a general consensus in nerd circles that Vista is NOT better than XP with SP3. There's even debate that in its current form, Windows 7 beta may not be worth abandoning Windows XP with SP3. ("Service packs" are major operating system improvements issued by Microsoft as it sees the need for such. Each is about 300 MB. Since XP's introduction in 2001, Microsoft has had only three service pack releases for XP.)

Hey, I like Vista!

There are some lawyers who have Vista on their computers and will attest that everything works fine. This article is geared toward those who have average or below computer skills and do not have time to deal with computer and software issues.

The specifics

I remember when Microsoft first rolled out Vista in 2007. Within weeks of the operating system going on sale, there were cries of false advertising against Microsoft because many consumers and small business users felt Microsoft misled them on "minimum system requirements" for Vista to work efficiently (e.g., RAM and graphics card). Moreover, users felt duped into thinking that Vista was fully backwards compatible, meaning that a user's existing software and equipment would work with Vista.

In 2009, users still suffer from the problems others experienced in 2007. In regards to law firms, there are many offices using equipment and software that worked great on Windows 98 and XP, but won't work with Vista.

Here is where the problems lay and why you should hang in there with XP (which is now a superb OS).

- **Time:** Installing Vista on the computers in your office, whether you have two or ten machines, is a time-consuming process. It is NOT simply a matter of inserting the Vista CD, installing the operating system, rebooting and then resuming the practice of law.

So much time is required to update your computer and software to work with Vista, they should have a huge red warning sticker plastered on the CD case telling people that on average, you will need to expend

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100 hours of labor to complete the upgrade.

Where does all the time go? Mainly it is having to search the Net for drivers and software program updates, as needed, so that your equipment and software will work with Vista.

"Drivers" are software code your computer operating system needs to make a device function. For example, your internal network, video and audio cards need drivers to operate. Drivers need to be compatible with whatever operating system you have installed on your computers. Drivers are also needed to operate your computer peripherals, such as a printer, special function keyboard, mouse, scanner or external storage device.

Software and program updates are often needed to work with different operating systems. For example, many antivirus programs have completely different installation files depending on the operating system one has installed on a computer.

While this does not seem like it should be an issue, the reality is that even if everything goes smoothly (and it never does), it still takes hours to install Vista and then search for Vista driver and program updates.

From my experience, I estimate that it takes about 100 hours to perform a major OS update, including driver and software updates.

• **Money:** Microsoft angered many who purchased Vista in 2007 when it told them that Vista operated fine with 512 MB of RAM (Random Access Memory.) Later the Company said 1 GB of RAM was needed, but even that was not accurate.

Soon into Vista's debut, it became known that in order for Vista to operate efficiently, a computer needed at least 2 GB of RAM. Computer owners were stuck having to reach into their wallets and fork over $50 to $150 for RAM chips.

Even in December 2008, Dell was selling notebooks with an insufficient 1 GB of RAM on Vista notebooks. (Arguably, I suspect, to make additional profit on selling RAM upgrades.) Sadly, I know people who in December had to spend $75 to buy a 2 GB RAM module, something they should not have had to do this late into Vista's being out on the market. (In last month's notebook buying guide I opined that if a retailer is not selling a Vista notebook with 2 GB of RAM minimum, you should pass on buying from that skinflint retailer.)

Other costs incurred on a Vista upgrade included the cost of buying new printers, for example, because the old printer manufacturer was not going to create Vista drivers. Since the printers would not operate without a current driver, the printer became obsolete and a charity donation.

As to software, companies that had Vista versions of an office's currently-owned programs considered the Vista versions upgrades and required payment to obtain the software.

• **Blue screen of death:** XP and Vista both got rid of the blue screen of death that we all used to see with Windows 98 and older operating systems. But the fact of the matter is, unless a program has a specific Vista version available, older programs designed for XP will on occasion crash.

What changed from the old days is that when there is a crash, XP and Vista crash the program and not the entire system. However, many Vista users complain that their programs crash more often in Vista than in XP, leading them to conclude that Vista is buggy and does not work with older programs and software, in contradiction to that advertised by Microsoft.

To be fair, there are those who use Vista exclusively and report that Vista works quite well for them. I suspect, therefore, the disparity in "user experience" (as software nerds like to call it) is due to some people using older programs with Vista (and maybe without checking to see if there are Vista updates for a program or piece of hardware.)

• **Vista has been terminated:** This is just my opinion. First, consider these facts: 1) Microsoft introduced Vista in 2007; 2) In 2008 MS announces Windows 7 will be replacing Vista; 3) In January 2009 Windows 7 beta is made available for download. Over three million people volunteer to be beta testers; and 4) Microsoft says that Windows 7 will debut in 2010.

It does not take an insider to figure out what is going on here. Vista is a bust. It's a dog with too many fleas. It's a failure.

Microsoft has addressed the problem by announcing that Vista will be replaced with Windows 7. Staying in character (lawyer), to me Microsoft's actions constitutes an admission that consumer complaints about Vista were and remain valid.

*Side note: I practice what I preach. Last year I bought a notebook computer that had Vista installed. I tried Vista for about six months, but was displeased to the point I recently performed a low level format (meaning I "erased" the hard disk) and happily installed Windows XP. (Good grief, I recall actually getting all tingly inside while getting rid of Vista and installing XP. That's sad.)

Before doing all of this, I first noted that the notebook manufacturer had for download the XP drivers needed for the Vista notebook. When talking to the manufacturer's tech support person, I asked why they made XP drivers available. He said that it was due to high demand for the XP operating system instead of the Vista operating system that the notebooks came with.

Bonus links

If you would like to read further information about that which I speak, here you go:

• *Microsoft's Windows 7 Beta site*. As the page says, don't bother looking for a place to download Windows 7. Microsoft discontinued the ability to download Windows 7 beta in February. (http://tinyurl.com/9agzvs.)

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If you scour the Net and find Windows 7 for download, make sure to install it on a separate machine that is NOT used in your daily practice. I had an unused desktop on which I installed it. Doing this will prevent any potential problems with data loss or file corruption.

• *Windows 7 Forum*: Here is a place where the nerds hang out to talk about Windows 7: http://windows7forums.com/.

Conclusion

Here we are in 2009 and remarkably circumstances have not changed much from when Vista reared its ugly head in 2007. While it is true that a computer purchased in 2009 will be configured to work well with Vista, purchasers are still faced with the daunting, time-consuming task of getting their old peripherals and software to work on the new machine. And anyone buying the Vista operating system to install on existing computers will most likely suffer the same problems users experienced in 2007: an old computer risks being incompatible with Vista, or at the minimum, operating as slow as molasses.

For these reasons, if you are buying a desktop or notebook computer, find out if the seller or retailer offers the option to buy the computer with Windows XP installed rather than Vista (many retailers offer the choice of XP or Vista on a new computer purchase). If there is a choice, go with XP.

I also suggest that you sit tight with XP and wait for Windows 7 to come out in 2010. Even then, conventional wisdom dictates that one should wait for a year or two BEFORE buying any new operating system Microsoft brings to market so that Microsoft has had time to work out all the bugs.

So that means you should not consider an operating system upgrade until 2012! Most likely by that time you will be ready to buy new computers and those will come with Windows 7 installed. So start saving your quarters now.

Who would have guessed that by reading this article, you will save a bucket load of cash because you don't have to buy a new operating system, and you can delay buying new computers to the year 2012 or later. (Feel free to PayPal me 10 percent of the money I just saved you.)

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