

## Windows 7: wipes out memory of Vista

Microsoft's long operating-system nightmare is set to be over with the introduction of Windows 7, launched worldwide on October 22, 2009.

The new software is a faster and much better operating system than the little-loved Windows Vista, which did a lot to harm both the company's reputation and productivity. PC makers will rush to fill physical and online stores with new computers pre-loaded with Windows 7, and to offer the software to Vista owners who wish to upgrade.

With Windows 7, PC users will at last have a strong, modern successor to the sturdy and familiar, but aged, Windows XP, which is still the most popular version of Windows, despite having come out in 2001. While XP works well for many people, it is relatively weak in areas such as security, networking and other features more important today than when it was first introduced around 1999.

This latest instalment of Microsoft Windows mostly banishes Vista's main flaws - sluggishness; incompatibility with third-party software and hardware; heavy hardware requirements; and constant, annoying security warnings.

Here are some of the key features of Windows 7:

**New Taskbar:** In Windows 7, the familiar taskbar has been reinvented and made taller. Instead of mainly being a place where icons of open windows temporarily appear, it is now a place where you can permanently "pin" frequently-used icons anywhere along its length, and in any arrangement you choose. This is a concept borrowed from Apple's similar feature, the Dock. But Windows 7 takes the concept further.

**Desktop Organisation:** A feature called Snap allows you to expand windows to full-screen size by just dragging them to the top of the screen, or to half-screen size by dragging them to the left or right edges of the screen. Another called Shake allows you to make all other windows, but the one you're working on, disappear by simply grabbing its title bar with the mouse and shaking it several times.

**Networking:** Windows 7 still isn't quite as natural at networking as Mac is, but it's better than Vista. For instance, now you can see all available wireless networks by just clicking on an icon in the taskbar. A new feature called HomeGroups is supposed to let you share files more easily among Windows 7 PCs on your home network.

**Speed:** On every machine it has been tested on, Windows 7 ran swiftly and with far fewer of the delays typical in running Vista. Start-up and restart times were improved. Reviewers have compared six laptops with Windows 7 with a MacBook Pro laptop. The Mac still started and restarted faster than most of the Windows 7 PCs, but the speed gap has narrowed considerably.

**Nagging:** In the name of security, Vista put up nagging warnings about a wide variety of tasks, driving people crazy. In Windows 7, you can now set this system so it nags you only when things are happening that you consider really worth the nag.

**Compatibility:** A wide variety of third-party software were tried, and they all worked fine on every Windows 7 machine. Windows 7 is also more compatible with a lot more hardware devices than Vista was.

**System Requirements:** Nearly all Vista PCs, and newer or 'beefier' XP machines, should be able to run Windows 7 fine. If you have a standard 32-bit PC, you'll need at least one gigabyte of memory, 16 gigabytes of free hard-disk space and a graphics system that can support Microsoft technologies. You'll also need a processor with a speed of at least one gigahertz.

**Installation, Editions and Price:** There are four editions of Windows 7 of interest to consumers. One, a limited version called Starter, comes pre-loaded on netbooks. A second, called Business, is mainly for people who need to tap remotely into company networks. A third, called Ultimate, is mainly for 'techies' who want every feature of all other editions. Most average consumers will want Home Premium, which costs US\$120 for upgrades.

Microsoft made Windows 7 Release Candidate available through June 2009. The RC is a great opportunity for PC users to take Windows 7 and begin testing in a real environment. Windows 7 RC will expire on June 1, 2010, so if you installed the RC release you will either need to upgrade to the final version of Windows 7 before that date, or install a prior version of Windows.

Microsoft has also offered a free Windows 7 Release-To-Manufacturing, or RTM, to PC users. This final version of Windows 7 was released with a 90 day free trial. At the 90 day mark, the trial automatically, and without warning, shuts down the PC every hour of operation. So to avoid all that inconvenience it is advised that you buy the real copy.

To help consumers who bought a new PC running Windows Vista or a copy of Windows Vista itself after June 26, 2009, participating PC manufacturers, including Dell, HP and Acer, are offering free upgrades as part of Microsoft's Windows

Upgrade Option Program to help customers transition easily to Windows 7.

Unfortunately, XP owners, the biggest body of Windows users, will have to back up their files elsewhere, then wipe out their hard disks before installing Windows 7. Microsoft includes an Easy Transfer wizard to help with this, but it moves only personal files, not programmes. This painful XP upgrade process is one of the worst things about Windows 7 and will likely drive many XP owners to either stick with what they've got or wait and buy a new one.

Bottom line, Windows 7 is a very good, versatile operating system that should help Microsoft bury the memory of Vista and make PC users happy.