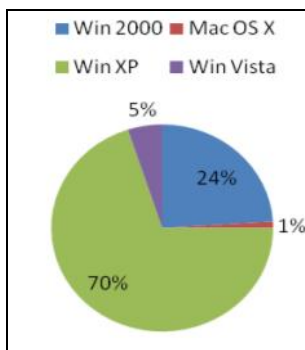


INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- ▶Mike's Message
- ▶Windows 7 Ships
- ▶Extending the Life of Your Windows XP PC
- ▶Twenty-four Years of Windows Boot Screens
- ▶Avoiding Electronic Ghouls & Goblins
- ▶You're In The Driver's Seat

Mike's Message

Can you believe that it has been 24 years since the first release of Microsoft Windows? This month Microsoft releases its latest and greatest; Windows 7. This operating system has gotten good reviews throughout the beta process and looks to be the "fix" to the problematic Vista release.

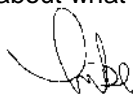


Because of problems, Vista hasn't taken hold in businesses in its two half year life-time. Less than 5% of the workstations that **SolutionWorx** manages run Vista. Take a look at our review of Windows 7 to see how we think Windows 7 might be different.

If you are running Windows XP, the eight year old work horse, there are many things you can do to keep it running well. See our recommendations on page 3.

And in light of Halloween this month, read our recommendations on keeping the electronic ghouls and goblins out of your systems.

As always, we love to hear your feedback. Drop us a line with ideas or thoughts about what you would like to see us write about.



Published monthly by:
SolutionWorx, Inc.
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14080-B Sullyfield Circle • Chantilly, VA 20151

Windows 7 Ships

One of the questions we receive is "What Operating System should I run on my business and home computers?" For most people we have been recommending Windows XP Professional. However, with the availability of Windows 7 it requires a closer look.



I took the opportunity to load the full version of Windows 7 Professional Edition on a spare hard drive I had for my laptop. This allowed me to live in both the Windows 7 world and drop back to Windows XP, if there were problems. I evaluated some key areas of my experience with Windows 7 and graded each area.

Install: Grade B

The install was fairly painless and Windows 7 found most of the hardware on my three year old Lenovo ThinkPad. Since my spare hard drive already had Windows XP loaded, it was technically an upgrade, but the "upgrade" from XP is destructive and all my previous configurations were erased.

I was impressed with the ease of the installation and thought it did much better than Vista had on hardware detection. Looking at some manufacturer sites (Lenovo and HP) reveals that there are not a lot of Windows 7 drivers available because they were included with the Operating System.

Compatibility: Grade C

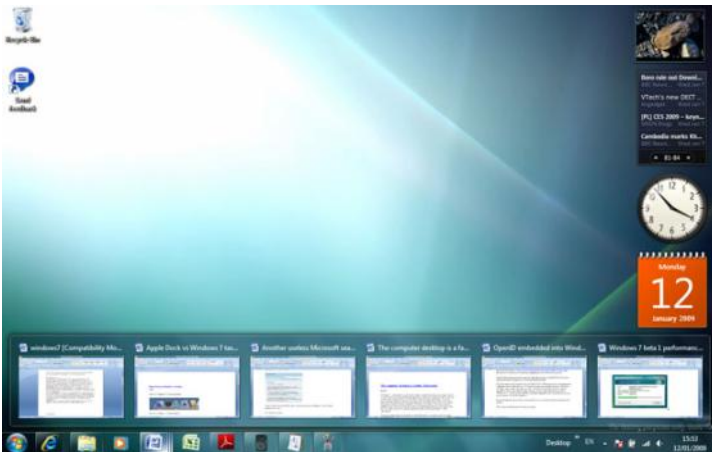
I started through the process of adding the key software I use daily: Microsoft Office, Firefox, Lotus Notes, Connect-Wise, Groove, Pandora, and a handful of others. Most installed fine and worked well. A couple had little quirks that will need to be fixed by patches or updates to the applications. A few didn't work at all. For the most part we are hearing that application providers say that their products will be certified for Windows 7 about 90 days after Windows 7 ships. There is a XP compatibility mode but it appears to require a significant effort to get it rolling.

Performance: A

The biggest test for me is how well does it work on my older laptop. I have plenty of memory, but the laptop is

(Continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1) **Windows 7 Ships**



aging. In this area I was very impressed. The old laptop was snappy and ran programs as well or better than XP, certainly much better than Vista. There is a host of new and improved diagnostic tools as well, which allows us to see the disk activity, network activity and processor and memory usage all right next to each other.

Boot up, hibernation and shutdown each worked well and quickly. Speed and performance was the best part of the test and made me want to use Windows 7 as my primary OS from now on.

New Look and Feel: Grade A

An impressive feature that made me want to use this OS is the new taskbar. With Windows XP/Vista, the system tray gets filled up with icons pushing left, and the quick start icons pushing right, which left little room for actual running programs. And then the order of the programs was always changing on the task bar. Here Microsoft took a hint from Apple and revamped the taskbar all together. System tray icons are hidden, but still easy to view. The quick start and the taskbar have been combined. When you start a program it shows up on the task bar. If it is something that you use frequently, you can right click it and select Pin to the taskbar, and it will always stay in the same place. In addition, if you have multiple windows those show when you mouse over the icon. Very useful. In the picture on this page, the mouse has rolled over the Word icon revealing six different open documents.

Security/Usability: Grade B

Microsoft had taken hits over the years for their lack of security and have responded with more and more restrictions to what you can and cannot do on a PC. This was challenging with Vista, but has improved with Windows 7.

The User Access Control setting can be adjusted by an administrator to allow for use of some programs and functions that Microsoft might construe as insecure.

Result: Thumbs up...in 3-6 months

I ended up switched back to my Windows XP drive because a couple of the critical programs I use every day didn't work properly. I tried again when those programs were updated, but with the same results. The features and performance make this a solid operating system for the future, but we need to wait for the application manufacturers to catch up with the new release.

We expect that in the next three to six months we will be recommending this operating system for all new systems.

Other Considerations:

There are a host of additional features with Windows 7 that I didn't address here, including support tools, libraries, and integration between the workstation and the server. For some clients many of these features will be a big hit and allow us to provide better support over the coming years as more users move to Windows 7.

Some of the new features in Windows 7 are tightly coupled with Microsoft's new Server Operating System Windows Server 2008 R2. Be cautious when reviewing features, some of them will require additional investment beyond the workstation.

Final Thoughts: Upgrading from Windows XP?

Upgrading an existing Windows XP system will need to be considered carefully. Most people buy their operating system with their computer – a method called OEM licensing. That means that you have the right to run that ONE operating system on that ONE computer. It can't be moved and upgrades are limited. The reason for that is the cost of the OEM license is much less than a full license.

The reality is that most people do not upgrade their operating systems on their existing computers. The new features are nice, but when you combine the cost of upgrading applications to work with the new OS, the cost of a full OS license, and the labor, you might be better off purchasing a new system.

If you want to consider how this new operating system might be beneficial for your organization, give us a call and we can discuss the costs and benefits.

Extending the Life of Your Windows XP PC



Although there is no definitive answer to the life span of a desktop PC, most experts agree that it falls somewhere between 3 to 5 years. Amount of use, environmental conditions, and maintenance are a few factors that can skew the figures. There are a handful of things that can be done to help extend the life of your computer and increase its performance. Consider the following when trying to extend the life of your Windows XP PC.

Hard Disk Error Checking

Checking and repairing your hard disk(s) is a simple procedure. To run a disk scan open My Computer and right-click Hard Disk, select Properties, click Tools tab, under Error-checking click Check Now, check Automatically fix file system errors and Scan for and attempt to recovery bad sectors. These scans typically do not start until your computer is restarted.

Disk Clean Up

Removing unnecessary files is easy with the Disk Cleanup utility. Run the disk cleanup utility by clicking on Start > Programs > Accessories > System Tools > Disk Cleanup. Check the files to delete and click OK.

Disk Defragmentation

Files on a computer are broken into parts and stored in various locations on your hard disk. Defragmenting your hard drive helps put those files closer together and creates a larger contiguous space to create new files. Defragmenting will increase your computers performance. To run the disk defragmenter, click on Start > Programs >

Accessories > System Tools > Disk Defragmenter. Click on your disk and click Defragment button.

Surge Protection

Using a surge protector helps prevent the sensitive components of a computer from being adversely affected by fluctuations in power or lightning strikes.

Remove Unnecessary Software

Programs that are not used take up unnecessary disk space and resources. To remove programs click Start > Control Panel > Add or Remove Programs and select the programs that are no longer used.

Keep it protected from threats

Keeping your computer behind a properly configured firewall and operating with up-to-date anti-virus will help keep your computer protected from threats that can damage your computer and stop it from operating.

Periodically Clean with Compressed Air

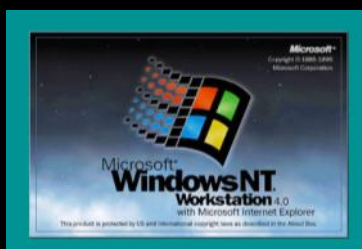
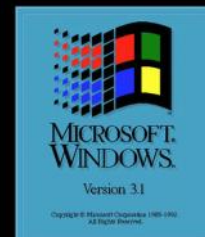
Accumulations of dust and environmental factors can have a significant impact on a computer. Periodically (every 6 months) open up your computer and clean the components with compressed air.

Finding time to complete these regular maintenance tasks may prove difficult for many business people. Through automation, our **Freedom IT Professional** clients have these regular maintenance tasks performed without business interruption during regularly scheduled evening maintenance windows. We estimate that this extends the lives of managed PCs by approximately 2 years.

Windows Boot Screens: 24 Years from blue to black



From the original blue Windows 1.0 boot screen in 1985 to the new black Windows 7 boot screen, there have been 14 windows releases and boot screens. Here are five. How many do you remember?



Avoiding Electronic Ghouls and Goblins



Ghouls and goblins don't surface on the Internet only during Halloween. They lurk in the shadows twenty-four hours a day and indiscriminately seeking victims at home, on the road, or in the office. The perpetrators seek personal information, money, surfing habits, hard disk space, processing power, and shields to launch attacks on other computer networks or websites. Although it is nearly impossible to prevent every attack or exploit, using caution and the steps below will help minimize the possibility of being infected with a virus or spyware.

Use caution when opening email attachments

Unknown file attachments that end in .scr, .vbs, .pif, .bat, .exe should not be clicked unless you know who they are from and what they do.

Don't click on pop-ups

"Alert: Your computer has been infected with 31 viruses, click here to install XYZ anti-virus to clean your computer". This is a common trick being employed right now to spread viruses and open your computer to exploitation. The message appears in what seemingly is a valid screen showing "your computer" being scanned. The reality is, it is an animated image in a pop-up window that when clicked installs harmful software. Bottom-line, don't click on any pop-ups, and not even the red x to close the window. Use Alt + F4 to close the web browser.

Use a multi-layered security approach

Install and update anti-virus software

Every computer should have a licensed and current anti-virus application running. Anti-virus software should be set to regularly (daily at a minimum) get updates so that your computer is protected from continuously evolving threats. Check your anti-virus today to ensure that you are getting regular updates. For personal computers AVG has a nice free option (www.free-avg.com)

Update Microsoft Windows and Office Products

Regular updates of Microsoft Windows and Office products are important to seal off existing vulnerabilities within the products. update.microsoft.com

Use a Firewall

Your computers should be protected by a software or hardware firewall that sits between your computers and the Internet. The Windows Firewall is not sufficient protection to keep a computer protected from today's threats.



Our **Freedom IT** customers have the comfort in knowing that a multi-layered security approach is proactively being managed for them. If you have questions about our security philosophy or our **Freedom Total Secure** offering, please contact us at 703-961-1840.



You're In The Driver's Seat!

We hope that you find this newsletter helpful. We try to put together articles and references that will help out with your daily computing life. Now, we would like to put you in the driver's seat. Last month we featured useful websites in our Bookmarks section. We would like your help in generating additional web-based resources that you find useful in helping get your job done. Please send the website address and a brief description of why you find it useful to bookmarks@solutionworx.com

Business Partner



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Value Knowledge**

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