

Are You Ready for Windows Vista?

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Windows Vista represents Microsoft's first operating system upgrade since Windows XP and the most significant upgrade to the company's operating system line of products since Windows 95.

Multiple Versions to be Made Available

When Microsoft releases Windows Vista, it will consist of five different versions: Windows Vista Home Basic; Windows Vista Home Premium; Windows Vista Business; Windows Vista Enterprise; and Windows Vista Ultimate. The latter, Windows Vista Ultimate, combines all the features of the consumer versions with all the features of the business version.

Windows Vista Business will be the default operating system on all new business machines. This version will provide new infrastructure improvements designed to free up IT staff, so that they spend less time on day-to-day maintenance of PCs and more time adding strategic value to the organization. It also will offer powerful new ways to organize, find and share information while staying better connected, both in the office or on the road.

Windows Vista Enterprise will be a special version of the operating system offered to customers who have active Software Assurance on their Windows Professional desktop licenses. Windows Vista Enterprise will include all the features of Windows Vista Business, along with new features designed to provide higher levels of data protection using hardware-based encryption technology. It also will include tools to improve application compatibility.

Lots of New Features

Here's an overview of the most important new features:

- Search functionality built into every aspect of the operating system
- A new user interface that will use your computer's video card
- Updated versions of popular applications such as Internet Explorer
- Security improvements that help users protect their information and make corporate networks more resistant to attack
- BitLocker Drive Encryption for superior data protection on mobile PCs

Let's examine these features more closely.

Instant Search

Microsoft has designed Windows Vista to provide a better user experience. Windows Vista adds integrated search functionality to the Start menu, which is referred to as "instant search." Simply type in the name of the program you are seeking, and the system will find it. No longer will you have to use the "All Programs" menu found in earlier versions of Windows.

Explorer also has been updated to include instant search, scalable live icons (scalable thumbnails), folder navigation for virtual as well as traditional folders, and a preview pane that includes metadata about your selected file.

A New User Interface

One of the most significant changes that most users will notice about Windows Vista is the user interface, which will scale based on your computer's hardware specifications. If your computer meets the Windows Capable minimum system requirements, you will see the Windows Vista Basic User Interface, which provides all core functionality of the operating system. If your computer satisfies the Windows Premium system requirements, you will see the Windows Vista Aero User Interface, which creates an environment that includes an additional level of visual presentation, most notably the introduction of transparent windows.

Building from the Aero User Interface, Microsoft introduces Windows Flip and Windows Flip 3D. Windows Flip builds upon the Alt + Tab functionality that was introduced in earlier versions of Windows by adding thumbnail previews of the documents on which you are working. Windows Flip 3D allows you to flip through all open windows in a three-dimensional view. This enables you to locate and select the window you want.

Another great enhancement is the Windows Live Taskbar Thumbnails. If you hold your mouse cursor over a minimized window, it will show you the contents of the window as a live thumbnail.

And In This Corner, Internet Explorer 7

Internet Explorer 7 (IE7) will be released along with Windows Vista. This updated version includes new features such as tabbed browsing and built-in support for RSS (Really Simple Syndication). More

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importantly, it builds upon Windows Vista's User Account Protection. By default, IE7 will limit your permissions to browse the Web, but not enough to modify your files or settings. "Protected Mode" will be a Vista-only feature. With Protected Mode, even if a malicious intruder or worm attacks a potential vulnerability, the site's code will not have enough privileges to install software, copy files to the startup folder or hijack the browser's home page or search provider.

Dramatically Improved Security

Of all of the features in Windows Vista, security is being most heavily promoted, and rightfully so. Windows Vista introduces User Account Control, which enables the user to change only common settings without requiring administrative privileges. It also restricts Windows Services from making unauthorized changes in the system files, registry, network or other resources that could be used to allow the installation of malware. Microsoft identifies this as Windows Service Hardening.

Windows Vista adds an outbound firewall and Firewall/IPSec GP Management Integration. This provides administrative control over any application you want to restrict on your network, such as peer-to-peer sharing programs. Specifically, this is accomplished by using the outbound filtering, which is built into the new Windows Firewall.

Lastly, Windows Vista adds Network Access Protection, which is used to block clients that do not meet your "system health policies" from connecting to your internal network — and potentially spreading malware to other PCs in your environment.

In Sync With Mobile PCs

Windows Vista will increase features for the mobile user, as well. Power Management has been updated to include a battery meter that will alert you to low power life. It also includes flexibility to allow you to easily change your laptop's power settings to match your needs.

Windows Mobility Center allows you to change your settings to adjust to your location, network or activities. This is done by collecting all of your key

mobile-related settings in one centralized location. These settings include: brightness controls; power plan; volume; wireless on/off settings; external display settings; display orientation; and synchronization status.

Windows Vista also will introduce Sync Center, which will give the user one central location for managing data synchronization. This includes synchronization between multiple PCs, network servers or with any device that connects to your PC. Using Sync Center, you will be able to see the status of all your synchronization activities, manually start syncs, stop a sync already in progress and receive notifications about potential conflicts.

Many of the problems mobile users encounter when configuring their computer settings for presentations and connecting to network projectors have also been addressed. Windows Vista includes a group of presentation settings that you can quickly apply when you connect to a display device. It also adds the ability to connect to network connected project, both wired and wireless.

Protecting Data on Mobile Devices

We hear an increasing number of stories in the news reporting that lost or stolen computers contained either sensitive corporate information or the personal information of a company's customers. Windows Vista helps to address this problem.

Windows BitLocker Drive Encryption represents a significant advance in the protection of sensitive data. This is a hardware-enabled data protection feature designed to prevent unauthorized access to corporate data on lost or stolen computers by encrypting the entire Windows volume. This feature is included only on Windows Vista Enterprise and Windows Vista Ultimate.

In addition to BitLocker Drive Encryption, Windows Vista also will offer an Encrypting File System (EFS) that will allow users to encrypt files and folders. If multiple people have access to the same computer, the encrypted files are available only to the user with correct permissions. It also increases the administrator's ability to manage the EFS on a network by supporting storage of EFS keys on smart cards. By using smart cards, you are able to determine what content the individual has access to, based on the permission stored on the smart card.

USB Keys and other removable storage devices are great tools for transporting your data from one PC to another or for backing up your data. Unfortunately, however, they are also great tools for stealing data. Windows Vista will give organizations the ability to restrict the use of USB Keys and removable storage devices, thereby creating a safer environment for your sensitive data.

How Microsoft Volume Licensing Can Help You Get Ready for Windows Vista

Windows Vista looks extremely promising. The question is, are you ready?

The easiest way to ensure that you have the rights to Windows Vista is to purchase Software Assurance with your Microsoft Volume licenses. You have the option of purchasing Software Assurance through the Microsoft Open License Program, the Microsoft Select License Program or the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement License Programs.

If you have already purchased Software Assurance and the coverage is active when Windows Vista is released, then you are set to receive the upgrade when it is released later this year. If you have not purchased Software Assurance with your licenses, now is the time to consider attaching Software Assurance with your Volume License purchases.

Microsoft also will be running two Windows Vista promotions that will last until October 31, 2006.

The first will allow you to add Software Assurance to your Windows XP Professional upgrade license now and enjoy a 30 percent discount on the upgrade license to Windows Vista. The second will allow you to attach Software Assurance to your Volume License PC purchases.

Normally, you have the right to attach Software Assurance to any new OEM machine within the first 90 days of its purchase. This new promotion extends this time limit to 180 days. You can take advantage of both of these promotions through the following programs; Select License, Multi-Year Open License, Open Value (excluding Open Value Company-wide option), Open License, Charity Open, GOLP, and Local Government.

Are you ready?

To learn more about software licensing, contact Mike Davis at inquiry@sarcom.com.