

Stuck on Windows XP, Now what?

By Ken Foster 9/06/2009

So you bought that trusty desktop computer back in 2005 and it's been pretty good to you. Sure it needed a bigger hard drive when you began scanning all your old pictures, but all in all you got your money's worth from it. But like all good things, it's showing its age, starting slower and slower and isn't as peppy as you would like. So what do you do? The Windows Vista campaign that Apple unleashed, all but crushed Windows Vista out of the gate. People who never even logged onto the OS began to parrot misconceptions and inaccuracies about the new features within Vista. But hey that was two years ago and now we have Windows 7, which launches on 10/22/2009. Windows 7 is the successor to Windows Vista and to be honest, what Vista should have been to begin with.

My experience with Windows 7 has been nothing short of stellar. For comparison, my Vista experience on brand new hardware was a solid 3.4 out of 5 to put everything into perspective. Affording a new system to accompany the new operating systems isn't always within everyone's budget. This time I decided to test Windows 7 on an old PC that was destined for E-disposal. This is more likely the type of system someone who can't afford a new PC might be using. My test system specifications are: AMD Athlon XP 3000 processor (2.17 GHZ), 1 GB of RAM, ATI Radon HD 2400 Pro (AGP) video card, and I installed the 32bit version of Windows 7. My Windows 7 experience rating is 3.5 out of 7.9, clearly not the top of the line. This review will be in stark contrast to the rating you will find in PC Magazine, which does excellent testing with top of the line hardware.

I learned that Windows 7 runs on lower powered systems faster and cleaner than Windows Vista does on newer hardware. It does well with a single core, single gigabyte of RAM, although you will want two minimum of each. The Glass experience runs well on my older video card, with lag or screen artifacts. I was fortunate to have a SATA drive in this test system; however you may experience a performance hit if you use the slower and older ATA drives. I believe that my 2 year old Vista box, with 2 cores, a faster processor, 4 gigabytes of RAM, a much faster Video card, and way more bells and whistles at a minimum performs as well as my test system. Clearly Windows 7 could be a life extender for those who want the benefits of current security enhancements, but can't afford to do a total system replacement. To see if Windows 7 will load on your current system here are the minimum specifications (per Microsoft): 1 GHz or faster 32-bit (x86) or 64-bit (x64) processor, 1 GB RAM (32-bit os) / 2 GB RAM (64-bit os), 16 GB available disk space (32-bit) / 20 GB (64-bit), DirectX 9 graphics processor with WDDM 1.0 or higher driver. You can also run the Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor, currently available from (<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-7/get/upgrade-advisor.aspx>). The video card requirement is probably the one which may cause the most challenges with users of older systems.

So now that you have determined that ol' faithful will install Windows 7, the real question is should you? If you have to make no changes to your current system, and cannot afford a new system, Windows 7 is a smart upgrade. It will provide you a higher level of security and extend the life of your current PC by potentially a few years. If you have to spend more than \$150.00 on any combination of hardware

updates, it would be more cost effective to buy a low-end new PC (estimated cost from Dell online for a baseline desktop without monitor is between \$250-\$450). The OS will cost you approximately \$119 to upgrade from XP to Windows 7 (but it will require a complete reload of your OS, see chart notes). So when you add the OS upgrade + the hardware upgrade, you could have easily bought a newer system.

So what's my personal plan? Well, as in IT professional, I never run out on day one and upgrade everything. So, I will retain a laptop on Windows XP for now along with a Windows Vista desktop (that older system I am testing Windows 7 on). I will upgrade my two production desktops to Windows 7 (these are my highest end machines) and wait for 60 days. That way if an unforeseen problem arises, I am not completely dead in the water. Within 120 days, all the systems here (with the exception of the one laptop) will be Windows 7. That's my plan.

Custom Install: A Custom install (clean) installation gives you the option to either completely replace your current operating system or install Windows on a specific drive or partition that you select. Custom install is also the method used to perform a multisystem boot or if you did not have an operating system installed. You can use the Easy Transfer Agent on the Windows 7 install Disk to copy your current profile files to an external hard drive or flash drive prior to installation. Using this option will delete all programs, files and settings in your current windows installation.

In-Place Upgrade: Keeps all your files, settings, and programs intact from your previous version of Windows.