Computer Tips
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More on Upgrading to Vista

For many of our readers, the decision to upgrade to Windows Vista will begin with the purchase of a new PC. But for others, the decision to upgrade will be based on weighing up the pros and cons. In this issue we will look more into Windows Vista, and discuss some of Vista's features and your different upgrade options.

Windows Vista sports a whole new way of displaying your PC's desktop and programs. The newly designed interface seems to invite you to explore the new look. The familiar Start button has been replaced with an elegantly shaped, rounded Windows symbol. Each window, instead of simply appearing, sweeps into view, and then fades out again when you close. This graphical effect is thanks to Windows Aero, the new engine behind Vista's new graphics. The down side to this new feature is that it takes a LOT of memory to run. You'll need a DirectX 9 compatible video card with at least 128MB of memory, and at least 1GB of system memory to run it.

Another feature of Vista is its enhanced security. Vista natively incorporates Internet Explorer 7 and Windows Defender, your main protection against spyware, malware, and malicious ActiveX programs. The folder and file security between users is controlled by the User Management Console, and is designed to be more intelligent. I found this useful here in the workshop recently, when I needed to unravel a series of folders a customer had encrypted in Windows XP, and then couldn't remember the password.

Some features of Windows Vista however are not available with all versions. Windows Vista comes in 5 different versions: Home Basic, Home Premium, Business, Enterprise, and Ultimate.

You might think you can just go out and buy the version that you think has the best features. However, this is not as easy as it might seem. First off, if you are wanting to upgrade to Vista, you can only do so if you are currently running Windows 2000 (with SP4) or Windows XP. You can buy Windows Vista if you are using Windows 98, ME, or Windows XP 64 bit, but you will need to buy a full version of Vista and do a clean install (ie. none of your current data can be used).

The upgrade decision is further complicated by the fact that if you are running Windows XP Professional, you can only upgrade to Vista Business or Vista Ultimate. If you are running Windows Media Center Edition, you can only upgrade to Vista Home Premium, or Vista Ultimate. Thankfully for most home users however, if you are running Windows XP Home, you can upgrade to all versions of Vista.

As discussed in our last column, the main consideration in choosing to go with Vista is whether your current PC and software will support it. My advice would be to ask around, and be sure to run the Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor, the handy update checker available from Microsoft's website. This way you find out if your system is compatible, before you spend your money.