

By Josh Hoskins

Windows Vista is coming, and there are plenty of reasons to upgrade. There are also plenty of reasons not to. Although some organizations are actively preparing for Vista, others are planning to stay the course with their current operating systems. Still others are planning to move to an entirely new environment. Whatever your decision, it's always helpful to know what you are getting into or giving up. Here's a look at 10 reasons why you should upgrade to Windows Vista... and 10 reasons why you shouldn't.

Why you should upgrade to Windows Vista

1 Security

One of primary design focuses for Vista was to create the most secure environment possible. Many basic aspects of Windows (such as running as an Administrator) have been changed to help produce this environment. Not only that, Internet Explorer 7 has many new features designed to help protect you while you are online.

2 Enhanced networking

Microsoft has rewritten its TCP/IP network stack for Vista to provide better performance. In addition, Vista has dramatically changed how users interact with the network devices in their PC and on their network. Now users can take advantage of the new built-in tools to help diagnose network problems. This will cut down on help desk calls and in some cases, speed up support. The help desk can use the information provided by the diagnostic tools to help in their troubleshooting.

3 Aero Glass user interface

The Aero Glass interface in Windows Vista is a major step forward for Windows in GUI design. Your Windows desktop has never looked better than it will under a Vista version supporting Aero Glass. Not only do things look better, but the whole layout of the GUI has been changed to make everything easier to find and more intuitive to use.

4 Integrated Sidebar and Search

Most of us have already installed a third-party search application, RSS reader, and sidebar or gadget dock in Windows XP. These features have been integrated into the OS itself and look fabulous under Aero Glass. You'll no longer need to open a browser to see your stocks or check on the weather. They will be constantly displayed (and updated) from the Windows Sidebar. Searching for your documents has never been easier, either, now that the integrated search function in Windows supports the indexing features of many newer search applications.

5 Windows Reliability and Performance Monitor

IT professionals are already familiar with Performance Monitor, but now the power of this utility has been brought to the masses. The new Windows Reliability and Performance Monitor can easily be set by a user to automatically take a baseline performance reading of their new PC. And when performance begins to suffer, this tool will help then diagnose what is causing the problem.

6 500 new GPO objects

Many companies rely on Active Directory and its Group Policy capabilities to enforce standards on their desktops. Windows Vista makes this even better by including more than 500 new Group Policy Objects.

7 BitLocker

As we've seen over the past few years, laptops are one of the biggest security holes for IT departments. The new BitLocker technology in Windows Vista can help mitigate this risk by encrypting data and making the computer unusable to anyone not in possession of the startup key (which can be typed in or stored on a USB key).

8 Continual support

Being the newest OS from Microsoft, Vista will be eligible for support longer than any other Windows OS available. Along with support from Microsoft, there will be support from the Internet at large, as people will be using Windows Vista for quite awhile into the foreseeable future. This offers some peace of mind, knowing that you can get help should you run into any issues.

9 ReadyBoost (USB drive as memory)

Microsoft has a new way to help you boost performance on your OS without requiring you to buy a lot of new expensive hardware. You can now plug in removable memory (USB key, compact flash, SD card, etc.) and assign all or part of it to use ReadyBoost. This means that the memory will be used as a prefetch section between your RAM and hard drive. In testing, this has shown that it can offer a great speed boost to many systems, especially those with limited RAM.

10 DirectX 10

DirectX 10 will be available only on Windows Vista. DirectX is useful for a variety of graphics and video functions, including business applications such as video conferencing. And if you must have the latest and greatest in games, the upgrade to Windows Vista is a no-brainer, as this is the only way you can get it. DirectX 10 also claims to fix the "small batch problem" from previous versions. It has claimed that this could lead to DirectX 10 games that can perform six times better than the same game running in DirectX 9 on Windows XP.

Why you shouldn't upgrade to Windows Vista

1 Stiff hardware requirements

Vista has the harshest hardware requirements of any Microsoft operating system to date. To use all of the features of Windows Vista, you need a 1 GHz processor, 1 GB of RAM, and a DirectX 9-capable video card. Although this will allow you to run everything, you'll get better performance with a faster processor and more RAM. Since the Aero Glass interface requires a DirectX 9-capable GPU, a lot of older desktops and laptops won't be able to use Aero Glass, even if they meet the other requirements.

2 Learning curve

Vista is a different animal from previous Windows operating systems. Many of the tools are the same or similar, but there is still a lot to learn. If your IT department is already stretched thin, taking the time to learn and implement Windows Vista may not be worth it right now.

3 No loss of WinXP support

Vista will be supported longer than XP, but XP still has two years of mainstream support from Microsoft. And a wealth of information on WinXP (and other operating systems) is already available on the internet. If you and your staff are comfortable with XP, there's little reason to upgrade to Vista for continued support at the moment.

4 Application incompatibility

Many popular applications do not work on Vista. Applications like iTunes and Nero have issues running on Vista. In fact, nearly every program involved in ripping or recoding media have issues with Vista. If these major applications are having compatibility issues, how many more small applications--those you may use everyday--will have problems, too?

5 DRM issues

Peter Gutmann from the UK's *The Register* has called Window Vista's new DRM the "longest suicide note in history." Even though great strides have been made for PCs in the living room as an entertainment device, Vista has put crippling DRM into place when playing next generation (HD-DVD and BluRay) content. When playing this content, the component output and S/PDIF output is disabled, effectively crippling Windows Vista as an entertainment system.

6 Notebook battery drain

Windows Vista requires more hardware power to run--and notebook battery life goes down the more you require of your PC's hardware. Even just running the Aero Glass interface will drain your battery faster, due to the additional GPU processing. Any dedicated road warrior should consider this before upgrading.

7 Not so innovative

You can download many advanced search applications for free. Even Microsoft has released one. Google has a nice sidebar with a built-in RSS reader available for free. Yahoo widgets (formally Konfabulator) allow you to change your desktop into a virtual workspace with all manner of data and tools available at your fingertips. Apple's OS X is by far the leader in modern desktops. Even Aero Glass cannot compare to the smoothness of OS X (which is more than five years old). Sun's Project Looking Glass can provide a minimal 3d desktop for XP for free.

8 Cost

Vista is expensive. There's no way around this. Microsoft has tried to mitigate this by releasing different versions of Vista with different price points. Unfortunately, many of these are feature crippled and cause more confusion than necessary. If you want Vista, expect to pay up to \$400 for one of the top versions.

9 A new video card for DirectX 10

DirectX 10 being Vista-only means that many gamers are waiting patiently on the newest OS. Unfortunately, not only will they have to pay for the OS, but they will also have to buy a new video card that supports DirectX 10. Currently, only NVIDIA's 8800 chipset is DirectX 10 compatible, with the lowest model (the GTS) having a retail price of \$399.

10 Slower game performance

Aero Glass is one of the cornerstones of Windows Vista, but it puts a load on your video card that will affect game performance. There are several reports of Microsoft telling developers that current games will run 10 percent to 15 percent slower on Vista than on Windows XP as a result. It remains to be seen whether this performance hit will continue to be an issue on games designed specifically for Vista.

Additional resources

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- Sign up for TechRepublic's [Downloads Weekly Update](#) newsletter
- Sign up for our [Windows Vista Report](#) newsletter
- Check out all of TechRepublic's [free newsletters](#)
- ["10 things you should know about Windows Vista's service hardening"](#) (TechRepublic download)
- ["10 things you should know about the Vista firewall"](#) (TechRepublic download)
- ["10 things you should do before installing Windows Vista on a computer"](#) (TechRepublic download)

Version history

Version: 1.0

Published: January 22, 2007

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