

READY NET GO ... NEWS

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Tip of the Month

Tips for Online Safety

Online security is more important than ever. Companies can only go so far in securing their websites; consumers must be proactive in protecting their identity and personal data stored on computers.

- ✦ Install and use anti-virus and anti-spyware software. Many companies offer packages that consist of anti-virus, anti-spyware, anti-spam software plus firewall protection.
- ✦ Create hard-to-crack passwords. Use uppercase and lowercase letters in addition to characters and numbers. If your password is in a dictionary or consists of birthdays or personal info, change them today. Create a list of your passwords in MS Excel and keep it on a flash drive in a secure place (not on your hard drive).
- ✦ **Backup your data!**
- ✦ Update your OS and software. Configure Windows Update to install updates automatically or get on a schedule to install manually. Microsoft releases updates usually on Tuesdays.
- ✦ Update your browser to the latest version. Although not foolproof, the most current browsers have the best security features available.
- ✦ Pay attention to your browsing habits – if you bank online, look at the address bar frequently and make sure it doesn't change to something unfamiliar. All secure sites should begin with <https://> instead of <http://> and should display a **lock icon** in the lower right portion of the browser window.

Microsoft's New OS - Windows Vista *Should you upgrade?*

You've heard the hype ... Microsoft released their latest Operating System a few months ago. Is it worth the upgrade? Will all of your peripherals work? How much will it really cost? We'll discuss these questions and give our analysis of the new software in this newsletter.

Microsoft Vista – Better than Windows XP?

There are several important updates to Microsoft's latest OS and a few updates that are just really cool. Here are some highlights:

Security

Security issues have plagued Microsoft for years and they finally have heeded the criticism and listened to analysts. Some improved security features include:

- 1) Internet Explorer 7.0 – Phishing site filters and security status bar work to ensure that the sites you visit are legitimate (*available for XP users too!*)
- 2) Windows Firewall – Now supports outbound filtering in addition to inbound filtering.
- 3) BitLocker Drive Encryption – Enables a PC and its data to be locked down during a threat (available only in Ultimate and Enterprise editions).
- 4) Vista Encrypting File System – Protects data by limiting others' access to specific files.
- 5) Shadow Copy – Creates point-in-time copies of files for retrieval in case of accidental deletion or errors (available only in Business, Ultimate & Enterprise editions).
- 6) Parental controls – can now be monitored remotely.

WWW (Websites Worth Watching)

- 1) www.familyeducation.com – Excellent site for parents or anyone else interested in child development.
- 2) www.av-comparatives.org – Independent review site of anti-virus software products.
- 3) www.mediafire.com – File sharing website - free

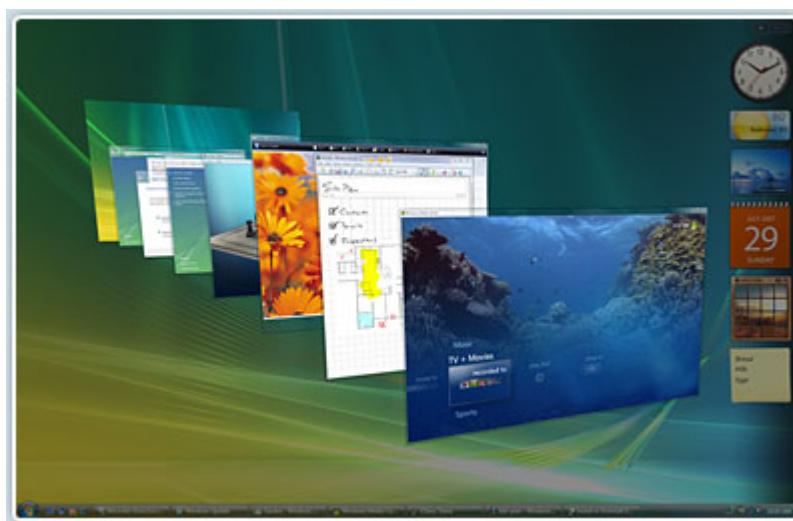
Vista Security - User Account Control

One sticking point is the addition of the **User Account Control** (UAC) for security purposes. Whereas UAC was devised to control Malware and inadvertent program changes initiated by users, it has proved to be quite an annoying feature to some. Pop-up boxes asking for your user name and password will appear whenever you initiate an activity that is security related such as adding or removing a user, installing a program, changing Windows settings and running certain programs. UAC is beneficial in that it will stop malicious actions originating from outside your computer that you did not initiate or inadvertent actions initiated by you or another legitimate user. Think of UAC like insurance; you have to pay the bill each month for the one day when you're really glad you have it.

Vista Efficiency

- 1) Windows Sidebar – Puts frequently used items like a clock, weather and other gadgets within easy reach. Can be fully customized. (see Figure 1)
- 2) Aero Interface – Includes taskbar thumbnails so you can quickly see the files you have open by hovering your mouse pointer over the filename and **Flip 3D** which enables the user to display all open windows in a three dimensional view on the desktop. (see Figure 1)

Figure 1. Vista Desktop with Aero interface, Windows Flip 3D and Sidebar



Source: <http://www.microsoft.com>

- 3) Search – Greatly improved feature lets you search for any file on your PC and on other PCs (if you have read permission). There are still glitches but it has been improved.
- 4) Mail – Microsoft has upgraded Outlook Express and renamed it **Windows Mail**. It now has email features similar to those found in Outlook so if you purchase the OS and you're a home user or home office user, you may find that you no longer need Outlook as your Personal Information Manager (PIM). Outlook is still the best option if you need more advanced features like integrating with **MS Exchange Server** and/or **synchronizing with portable devices** such as PDAs.
- 5) Calendar – Create group calendars and even publish your calendar on the web. This feature is compatible with syncing iCalendar-compliant calendars such as the one in Outlook.

Vista Networking

- 1) Network and Sharing Center – Interface has been improved making it easier to network wired and wireless connections. Worthwhile additions include a visual map of your network showing all devices including PCs, printers, and routers.
- 2) Remote Desktop – Additional improvements make Remote Desktop Connection easier in the workplace.
- 3) Network Explorer – Browse content on any PC connected to the network and even print to any connected printer. Specific hardware icons make finding a device easier.
- 4) Network Awareness – New feature that enables portable devices to change settings depending on the type of connection needed (i.e., office network or wireless connection at an Internet café)

Some new features like the **Backup tool** (for backing up data), **Meeting Space** (for holding virtual meetings with up to 10 users) and **Sync Center** (for syncing files between a PC and external devices) are great ideas but they fall short in real-world applicability. If all you need are the basics, these features will work but if you need robust productivity applications, third party software will still need to be used for optimum efficiency.

One of the biggest **advantages to Windows Vista** is that it was created from the ground up with all new code. Windows XP was built upon previous editions so although new features were added, the insecurities inherent in previous versions were carried forward with some being fixed and others lying dormant just waiting for a hacker to exploit the fault. Vista will still have security vulnerabilities but hopefully issues will be quicker and easier to resolve. As with all new technologies, only time will tell how the new operating system will affect business and consumer users.

In summary, **Vista is a substantial improvement over Windows XP** and all previous Microsoft Operating Systems. If you are looking to purchase a new computer or you want to upgrade, definitely consider Vista. Use the following scenarios as a guide in your decision-making.

Should You Upgrade or Keep Windows XP?

The answer to this question depends on the following scenarios:

1) **Your PC is fairly new so you want to purchase the Vista upgrade software only.**

In this case, it depends on what kind of hardware you have installed in your current PC. If your current computer is Vista Premium Ready (see next page), then upgrading will require very little other than purchasing the software. If you need to purchase additional hardware like RAM or a new video card to run Vista optimally, then you'll have to evaluate the cost of upgrading compared to the cost of purchasing a new PC. Depending on your current specs, it may be financially beneficial to purchase a new PC with Vista pre-installed.

2) **You need a new PC. Should you purchase one with Vista or with Windows XP?**

Preliminary tests show that compared to Windows XP, Vista is more secure, has improved networking capabilities, has an improved interface, and offers better search capabilities. **The biggest drawback** is that since it is still in its infancy, **not all manufacturers have released drivers for their products**. If you are thinking about switching, do a bit of research first and check to see if your favorite programs offer **support and drivers for MS Vista**. If a majority of your programs are not supported, you may want to wait to upgrade. [If you need to buy now, make sure the computer is labeled Vista-Premium Ready or has the minimum specs ** outlined on page 4.]

3) **You aren't sure about Windows Vista yet and are thinking about getting a PC with Windows XP that is Vista-Premium Ready. Is this a viable option?**

Although Windows XP became a fairly stable OS, it took multiple versions to get there and is still being updated. Keep in mind that if you purchase a new computer with Windows XP installed, you'll have to manually apply the security and critical updates which can take **upwards of an hour to install** (with a broadband connection). Depending on how many computers you want to purchase, this process could take a substantial amount of time.

** If you opt to buy a PC with Win XP installed instead of Vista, make sure the PC has **at least** the following specifications to make upgrading in the future realistic:

Vista Premium Ready specifications

- a) 1 GHz processor (32-bit or 64-bit)
- b) 1 GB of system memory (2 – 4 GB of RAM is preferred)
- c) Support for DirectX 9 graphics with at least 128 MB of dedicated graphics memory and Pixel Shader 2.0 – 256 MB or greater is ideal (look for a PCI-E rather than an AGP interface)
- d) 40 GB hard drive space (minimum)
- e) DVD-ROM drive (or DVD±RW) – the Vista installation disk is on DVD

Vista Versions

Microsoft has released five versions: Enterprise, Ultimate, Business, Home Premium and Home Basic.

- **Enterprise** is only available through volume licensing – Software Assurance.
- Most Business users will choose between **Enterprise**, **Ultimate** and **Business**.
- Consumers will choose between **Ultimate** and **Home Premium**.

For a side-by-side comparison, visit:

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/editions/choose.mspx>

Vista Versions – Highlights

Home Premium features the Windows Media Center and Windows DVD Maker which enhance your multimedia experience. These programs allow you to pause, record and watch TV on your PC, laptop or mobile device (similar to TiVO) and create DVDs. Hook up to 5 Media Center Extender systems to watch shows in various rooms of your home.

The **Business version** offers Remote Desktop Connection, Windows Fax and Scan, and Windows Complete Backup and Restore; essential features for most businesses.

If you need or envision a need in the future to connect to a domain, you will need the **Enterprise**, **Ultimate** or **Business** version.

The **Ultimate version** offers all available options.