What's Up With Windows 7

By Gary Brock

As an IT person of sorts I read several industry journals and newsletters weekly. As you can imagine most of these publication and the articles in them are really boring and full of acronyms and techno-ease like, "SME", I see that one all the time. It stands for (Small-Medium size Enterprises) as in, "Most SME's are now starting to look at upgrades having skipped the VISTA release..." And "OS", as you may already know, stands for (Operating System) and "OEM" which stands for (Original Equipment Manufacturer) or "MAP", I bet you didn't know that one. It stands for (Microsoft Assessment and Planning). And of course the one I just used above, "IT" stands for (Information Technology), all ways of getting something said with the least number of keystrokes.

I have noticed recently that Windows 7, the soon to be released new version of the Windows OS from Microsoft, is the subject of more and more articles in these trade papers. The bulk of the articles deal primarily with, "how Windows 7 fits into the future of IT and "what SME's should be doing to plan for the obvious and inevitable deployments and upgrades." If you are a network administrator at one of these SMEs there is much to be learned about such things as "AppLocker", "BitLocker", "BranchCache", "DirectAccess", "EnterpriseSearch" and "Virtual Desktop Infrastructure". How about those gobbledygook terms? Well these are all tools that the enterprise IT overseers and mobile power users have been demanding for some time and will now be available in Windows 7. But there is little being said that would apply to us individual PC and Laptop users that just want to do a few simple operations like get our email, prepare a document or surf the internet. So I will try to glean what I can from these articles that would be of interest our community and put it into language that I hope more of us can understand.

First, there seems to be a consensus in all the articles that it's probably not a good idea to jump into a Windows 7 upgrade without some serious planning first. In an article called, "Are You Ready For Windows 7?" by Sandra Kay Miller (Processor magazine, August 14, 2009) she quotes David Jackson, a former corporate IT professional who now provides targeted consulting to organizations and nonprofits with limited IT budgets, who says:

> "It pays to plan well in advance for an OS upgrade. The easiest OS upgrade path is to make the switch when you purchase new hardware. OEM versions are often the least expensive, and you know the OS will be compatible with the hardware on which it's running."

That's good practical advice. If, however, you are planning to upgrade your existing hardware, Jackson stresses the importance of testing third-party applications prior to moving to Windows 7 and if you have critical applications that won't run on the new OS, it may be more economical to make do with the older OS. I should also note here that it has been announced that Microsoft plans to pull support for Windows XP in the spring of 2014.

In the same article Sandra tells us that Windows 7 will offer a variety of editions ranging from Home to Enterprise and that although SMEs may opt for the Professional version, the Ultimate and Enterprise editions offer a number of additional features, including the gobbledygook items I mentioned above.

So we individual or consumer users will probably be selecting either the Home or Professional editions to upgrade our existing hardware. Again from Sandra's article we learn that, although Microsoft is providing a discounted upgrade package for WinXP users so they will not have to bear the brunt of a full-priced version, to upgrade these machines to Windows 7 will require a clean install. That means that end users will still be responsible for backing up and reloading user data and applications like Office and your Family Tree Maker and Photo Album software etc.

For Vista machines, the upgrade path could be equally murky. The migration path is very specific according to the OS edition. For instance, Windows Vista Business can only upgrade to Windows 7 Professional and Windows Vista Ultimate to Windows 7 Ultimate. But for users upgrading between

editions, a clean install must be performed. Clean installs are also required for upgrading between 32-bit and 64-bit versions.

The hardware requirements for Windows 7 are basically the same as they are for Vista, the first time ever a release of Windows hasn't required significantly more horsepower than the previous one. And it runs better on that hardware, or at least *feels* like it does.

What's Good

"Windows 7 is the biggest step forward in usability since Windows 95. In fact, over half of what makes it better than Vista boils down to user interface improvements and enhancements, not so much actual *new features,"* says Matt Buchanan on (Gizmodo The Gadget Blog).

"Its fancy new user interface, the heart of which is Aero Peek, making every open window transparent except the one you're focusing on at the moment so you can find what you're looking for, actually changes the way you use Windows."   Mat continues, "It breaks the instinct to maximize windows as you're using them; instead, you simply let windows hang out, since it's much easier to juggle them. In other words, it radically reorients the UI (user interface) around multitasking." Mat says that, "after six months of using Aero Peek and the new launcher taskbar, going back to Vista's taskbar, digging through collapsed app bars, or even its Peek-less Alt+Tab feels barbaric and primitive."

Windows 7 brings back a sense of a tightness and control that was sometimes missing in Vista. There's a technical reason for this relating in part to the way graphics are handled, moments where I've felt like I wasn't in control of my PC have been few and far between, even during the beta and release candidate periods.

The Verdict

Well, after going over the comments of several of these pun dents I get the idea that most feel that Windows XP was a great OS in its day and that Windows Vista, once it found its feet several months in, was a good OS. Now with Windows 7, the OS is great again. It's what people said they wanted out of Windows: Solid, more nimble and the easiest, prettiest Windows yet. There's always a chance this won't be a huge hit come October, given the economy and the state of the PC industry. And for us individual consumer users there is always some reluctance to be the ginny pig and wait for the bugs to be dealt with. But here with Windows 7 we may have something people can grab without fear.