

## BUSINESS &amp; CAREERS

# Updating to Windows 7 has perks, drawbacks

After years of galling “Hi, I’m a Mac—And I’m a PC” ads, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer may want to make an ad out of the following anecdote:

Toronto real estate lawyer David Feld updated all 8 Vista PCs in his office to Windows 7, Microsoft’s latest operating system. Seeing how well the computers ran using Windows 7, he wiped the operating system from his Apple MacBook Air and installed Windows 7 on it as well.

“I’ve been using Macs for the last five years,” Feld says. “I believe Windows 7 wins.”

A self-professed early adopter, Feld has nothing but praise for Windows 7. “It’s not crashy,” he explains. “It’s prettier, more fun to use—I’m trying hard to not say it’s more Mac-like—and it isn’t as daunting.”

This is the kind of news Ballmer and company crave after Vista, the previous version of Windows, earned Microsoft widespread scorn and disappointing sales. (Praise for Windows 7 has not echoed across the Internet the way criticism of Vista did, but after Vista, the relative quiet of Windows 7’s arrival must sound like good news to Microsoft.)

People in the legal industry, particularly those running older XP-based machines, may want to take note of certain improvements in Windows 7.

For instance, computer owners can encrypt data on their hard drives using a feature called BitLocker. While BitLocker debuted with Vista, Windows 7 added BitLocker to Go, which forces encryption of any removable media (e.g. USB memory keys).

“You can set policies within offices to ensure—especially on mobile comput-



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ers—that all data must be encrypted,” says Phil Senecal, legal counsel and chief technical consultant for Montreal-based Ledjit Consulting Inc.

Senecal also eliminates the confusion of which Windows version lawyers should buy. “You must have Windows Ultimate to have all the capabilities of BitLocker,” he says. (Windows Enterprise offers the same features as Ultimate, plus volume licensing for large firms.)

Elliot Katz, senior product manager, Windows Client for Microsoft Canada, suggests lawyers approach BitLocker with care. “If you lose the key and all your client-critical information is on the computer, you

can’t get at that data,” he says. “You can’t get it restored even by data recovery specialists.”

“You need an IT infrastructure if you use BitLocker or BitLocker to Go,” he recommends.

While BitLocker protects against data loss, its sibling AppLocker shields Windows itself from unauthorized software. This includes both legitimate software that isn’t authorized by an administrator as well as malicious software that could harm the computer.

“You specify exactly what applications can run or be installed on a PC,” says Katz. “You enforce application standardization.”

Mobile and telecommuting lawyers can use Direct Access to safely connect to office networks. “It has all the security features of VPN without using VPN,” Senecal says. “It’s almost invisible to the user.”

Regarding malware, Senecal maintains that most threats come through web browsers. “Hackers aim their efforts at the most popular browser, Internet Explorer,” he says, which is why he advises people to switch to “marginal” browsers like Apple Safari or Google Chrome. “There are fewer chances of malicious software harming your computer,” he explains.

Beyond improving security, Microsoft simplified the interface in several ways. Feld uses Live Thumbnail Preview to keep his taskbar orderly. “Say you have three Word documents open,” Feld says. “Windows 7 only shows one taskbar icon. I move the mouse over the icon and I see the three documents previewed. Then I click the document I want to work with.”

Feld enjoys working with documents—moving, ordering, resizing and so forth. “It’s a breeze—it feels instant.”

Microsoft has also improved the way its flagship operating system handles the hardware under its control. On equivalent hardware, Windows 7 starts up, shuts down and generally runs more quickly, particularly on multicore systems (although other software that is not ready for multicore processors won’t speed up on Windows 7).

Feld’s voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) system works better on Windows 7. “They eliminated issues that were in Vista,” he says.

Tablet support has also been announced, although neither Microsoft nor third-party developers have said much on the topic. (“There’s nothing pulling me to Windows tablets,” Feld says. “I want the Apple iPad.”)

All this upgrading, of course, comes at a price. Senecal estimates the bill for upgrading 20 computers at north of \$5,000. “That’s a little steep for some small businesses,” he comments.

Newer computers (less than three years old and meant to run Windows Vista) can be upgraded in about four hours, Senecal says, depending on the computer’s hardware and software configuration.

“You might want to upgrade your servers too,” adds Feld, “to make server response faster for staff members.”

Given the time needed to upgrade older XP machines—they require complete Windows 7 installations, plus the time to reinstall software, plus the time to recover data from backups—Senecal advises against upgrading them. “Wait until you buy a new computer,” he says.

When Vista came along, Microsoft faced a sales-stalling challenge: many businesses stuck with XP since their software didn’t work properly on Vista.

To prevent recurrences of this complaint and spur adoption of Windows 7, Microsoft created Windows XP Mode, which runs inside Windows Virtual PC (both free downloads). These let people run software in an “XP window” as though it were another Windows 7 application.

What of XP itself? Katz says Microsoft will support XP Service Pack 3 (SP3) until April 8, 2014, while XP SP2 support expires April 13, 2010.

But continued Microsoft support alone doesn’t obviate the need for an upgrade. “Lawyers need to check with software vendors to make sure they will continue to support versions that run on XP,” Katz says.

Where businesses once waited for Service Pack 1 before adopting a new version of Windows, Senecal, a beta-tester for Microsoft, says that isn’t happening this time. “Many people view Windows 7 as a service pack to Vista, so they’re comfortable with it,” he says. ■

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