

# Dead Trees

A PUBLICATION OF  
QUESTIONABLE VALUE FROM  
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## Windows XP: Good, bad, or ugly?

**People** ask me if they should upgrade to Windows XP or wait to buy a new computer that already has Windows XP. My answer is an unequivocal YES. Yes, you should install the upgrade. And YES, you should wait. If you're wondering whether it's painful coming down on all sides of an issue, the answer to that is also YES.

WINDOWS 95: Don't bother. Buy a new computer.

WINDOWS 98 (particularly if you have Windows 98SE): There is no pressing need to upgrade. Your next computer will have Windows XP.

WINDOWS NT4 WORKSTATION: Maybe. If everything is working, it might be better to leave things alone until you buy a new computer.

WINDOWS 2000: There is absolutely no good reason to upgrade the computer to Windows XP.

WINDOWS Me: If your Me installation is trouble-free, leave it alone. (And be very thankful.)

### I've upgraded 2 systems

**FIRST:** When I bought a new notebook computer (Sony Vaio) I accepted Windows Me only because I needed the computer quickly and I was told that I could install Windows 2000 on it. With more than a little assistance from Sony, I was able to get Windows 2000 loaded and operational. About that time, my XP upgrade from Sony arrived.

All of my software worked properly with XP.

**SECOND:** Microsoft sent me an evaluation copy of Windows XP that I elected to install on my desktop computer. This is a machine that has a lot of software on it because it's the machine I use for testing. The preflight check told me that there would be four problems:

- GoBack is incompatible with XP.
- The currently installed driver for the NetBEUI protocol is not compatible with Microsoft XP.
- Easy CD Creator 5 must be reinstalled after the upgrade.
- The Symantec Utility Driver will cause stability problems and will be disabled.

None of these problems surprised me. Windows XP offers its own version of GoBack, I don't use the NetBEUI protocol, reinstalling Easy CD Creator 5 would be no problem, and I bought an upgrade to Norton Antivirus 2002.

Office XP started launching Powerpoint every time I started the system. Powerpoint then crashed and wanted to send a report to Microsoft. When I removed the Microsoft Office shortcut from the StartUp folder, the problem went away.

My user accounts all survived. The applications I use most frequently worked. Windows XP was visibly slower than Windows 2000 and offered me nothing essential that was missing from Windows 2000, but for those who are using Windows 98 or Windows Me, it will offer enhanced stability.

### Thinking about upgrading?

Based on numerous experiences, most of them ugly, I am of the opinion that no operating system, Microsoft or any other, should ever be upgraded in place. If you want a new operating system, the right way to do it is to format the boot device.

Despite this, I elected to use the upgrade path when I installed XP and for the first few days, everything seemed OK. Then I encountered a problem with a third-party application and the operating system that had been working reasonably well slowed to a crawl and ... no ... matter ... what ... I ... did ... the ... machine ... remained ... pitifully ... slow.

So I decided to format the C drive, load Windows XP, and reload all the software.

Fortunately (I thought), I keep all of the data on drives D, E, and F. Formatting the hard drive should mean that I would have to reinstall every application, but I shouldn't lose any data.

I booted from the CD and began the installation process. Then the craziness began. The format process appeared to have formatted drive D and to have left drive C untouched (as D). That meant most of my data files were **gone**. It's a good thing I believe in backup! *Postmortem analysis: I had forgotten that Windows NT/2000/XP isn't smart enough to find a SCSI disk as drive C if there's also an IDE drive in the system. That's why the installer showed the IDE drive's first partition (my drive D) as drive C. That's what I formatted.*

I attempted to install Veritas Backup Exec, but the process failed because the CD I have isn't for Windows 2000 or XP. I had downloaded an upgrade, but it was on my backup tape. I decided to try MS Backup (a variant of Veritas Backup Exec). After approximately 7 hours, I concluded that the process would never end. I was beginning to be concerned about lost data.

### What the heck is this?

Dead Trees is the William Blinn Communications newsletter. It's published whenever I feel like it, although I generally feel like it when I'm preparing the month's invoices. If you didn't receive an invoice with this newsletter, kindly contact me and we'll rectify that situation. Please note that despite the name, of the publication, I bear no particular animosity toward trees. The name is simply an acknowledgment that paper is made from, well, dead trees.

Without opening the case, unplugging the IDE drive, and reinstalling Windows, there was no way to get the SCSI drive to be the boot disk again. I decided that would be OK. Conventional wisdom suggests using the *fastest* drive for the operating system. But the “slow” drive on this system is fast and I need optimal speed on the data drive. So I decided to leave the SCSI drive as the data drive, but I wanted it to be drive D.

Thanks to the disk management capability in Windows 2000 and XP, I was able to quickly and easily change the drive letters. Booting from the first partition of the IDE drive makes it C, but the SCSI drive is now D. The second partition on the IDE drive has logical devices E and F, so that much was back to normal. G and H were still the CD ROMs and the Zip drive became Z again.

I downloaded and installed a trial version of BackUp MyPC (the new name for Backup Exec.) I relaxed when Backup MyPC recognized both the tape drive and the tape. Creating a catalog from the tape was successful. I started a full restore of drive D (10,532 data files, about 3.6GB, from October). When that ended, I started a restore from last Saturday’s differential backup (5,626 files, about 2.1GB).

I spent the next several days reinstalling software, downloading updates and patches, restoring settings either manually or from tape backup, and organizing the computer. In the final analysis, the only files lost were about half a dozen e-mail messages that I’d saved between the last backup (Saturday) and the disaster (Monday).

## Who’s responsible for this mess?

As much as I’d like to blame Microsoft for the problems, I can’t. At least not entirely. This computer sees a lot of software come and go. When I started the upgrade, the operating system was already showing signs of instability. That’s why I waited until I had enough time to recover from a major meltdown.

Overall, the installation process is the best I’ve seen from Microsoft and for most people (those who don’t add and delete half a dozen programs a week) the upgrade process will probably work well as long as the software on the computer is reasonably recent and the hardware is supported.

## Don’t hate me because I’m pretty

The first thing you’ll notice about Windows XP is its appearance. Buttons are rounded and therefore more *electrodynamical*.<sup>\*</sup> They flow through the electron stream to your screen even faster than regular buttons. And then there are the new color schemes and themes – enough to make a commercial artist tremble in fear. Or at least stare in disbelief.

*\*FULL DISCLOSURE: Electricity does not flow through copper wires at the speed of light, but it moves faster than a skinny cat on an icy sidewalk.*

*Rounding the buttons does not, of course, make anything faster.*

The Start Menu has been changed radically, and I’m not sure that the changes are an improvement. For me, the changes are decidedly not an improvement. Programs come and go on the Start Menu’s “recent programs” section depending on how recently they’ve been used. I use a lot of programs and, because I’m always testing, I may use an application intensely for a few days and then never see it again.

I prefer a Start Menu with programs arranged by category (Internet, graphics, publishing, utilities, and so forth). Some categories have sub-categories (the graphics menu contains

Newsletters, leaflets, books, newspapers ...

They’re ALL a **SNAP**  
with Ventura Publisher.

Corel main, Corel other, Adobe, Macromedia, Xara, other, and utility sub-menus). I can quickly find and start any program without having to look at a list of programs that stretches across the screen.

Most users don’t have this large variety of applications, so the new Start Menu may work for a lot of people. If it doesn’t you can revert to “classic” menus. That’s what I’ve done. I’ve also reverted the Explorer to its “classic” look because the new design (while quite attractive) omits too much information.

## What about “activation”?

Microsoft’s newest products (Windows XP and Office XP) must be “activated”. Registration is optional. The “activation” is the latest attempt by a software publisher to “copy protect” its software. While I understand the rationale, I wonder if activation might not punish the innocent. This has been the effect of most copy protection schemes over the years.

Those who want sell pirated copies of software in bulk will figure out how to break the copy protection. Meanwhile, some say, those who have a legitimate need to create a copy of the software will be blocked from doing so.

Microsoft has done a good job when it come to protecting the innocent. Let’s take Office XP as an example. The license allows me to install Office XP on a desktop computer and a notebook computer. Each installation must be activated. I did that. But then I had to format the drive on my notebook computer, reinstall the operating system, and reinstall Office XP. That required a second activation. While I anticipated having to make a phone call to Microsoft to explain what I was doing, that didn’t happen. The activation was approved instantly.

I presume that I would be blocked from installing Office XP on a third computer and activating it, but the process was smart enough to recognize that the third activation was from a notebook computer that had already been activated. The process concluded (correctly) that I had reinstalled the software. I installed and activated Windows XP at least 3 times (on the same machine) without any problem.

For both Windows XP and Office XP, the activation process requires only that the user specify the country in which the activation is taking place. The process is quick and painless. So while I wish that Microsoft hadn’t decided to insist on “activation”, I’m happy to report that the process is relatively painless.

## What’s right for you?

I don’t know. Some pundits say that XP is slower than Windows 2000. That is true, but the differences are minimal – not enough that I can tell a difference in daily operation.

Windows XP (either Home Edition or Professional) will be on your next computer. Only you can decide if it should be on your current computer. 