Your Next Computer Will Run Windows 7

Microsoft has officially stopped selling Windows XP, but you can still buy computers with XP if you buy from a company that has stockpiled a bunch of XP licenses. (I happen to know of one that has.) But eventually that supply will run out and most OEM licenses can't be transferred from one computer to another, so now is the time to get ready for Windows 7.

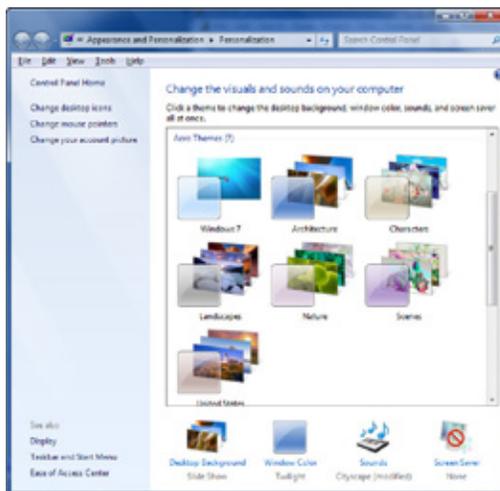I've been using Windows 7 since release candidate 1 was made available to the general public in mid 2009.

I've been running the RTM (release to manufacturing) version since early September, when it was provided to manufacturers and to Microsoft TechNet subscribers. Although it's not perfect, it's far better than Vista and even beats XP in many cases.

If you've ever battled a home network, you're going to love Home Groups. Windows 7 has the best file and printer sharing that Microsoft has ever created. When two computers that are on the same network are both running Windows 7, they recognize each other and users can share resources with ease. When I attached my notebook computer to the LAN, the desktop computer could see it as soon as the notebook was ready for logins.

Sharing a directory is as easy as right-clicking and choosing whether those who have access to the directory can read files but not write or change them or whether they have full access.

As much as I like the way Windows 7 works, I'm annoyed by Microsoft's decision to release multiple versions of the operating system and to withhold essential features from all but the high-end versions of the OS. If Microsoft sold automobiles, engines would be available only with the Home Premium Automobile and, if you wanted tires and brakes, you would need to upgrade to the Ultimate Automobile. This is simply ridiculous.

- *Starter* is for netbooks with processors slower than 2GHz, 1GB of RAM or less, no more than 250GB of disk space, and a monitor no larger than 10.2 inches (diagonal). Users will not be able to customize the operating system, play DVDs, or access streaming media. You cannot have multiple monitors or use

Windows 7 has a lot of eye candy and ear candy and you might think that's silly. I don't. We decorate our homes, our cars, and our offices. Why not make the computer you spend so much time in front of look and sound the way you'd like it to!

the "fast switch" option for multiple users. Aero is not supported. If your computer is anything but a netbook, avoid the Starter version.

- *Home Basic* shouldn't be sold on machines destined for the United States. Fast user switching is available, but this version cannot play DVDs or stream multimedia files and Aero is not supported.
- *Home Premium* is the lowest-common-denominator operating system. It supports Aero and includes DVD playback, better network management, and the most minimal set of features that most people will need. Home Premium will cost $120 (upgrade) or $200 (new).
- *Professional* improves networking capabilities and allows file encryption. For those who need to use XP mode, this is the first version that supports it. Professional is $200 (upgrade) or $300 (new).
- *Enterprise* is designed for commercial customers. It is essentially Ultimate with another name.
- *Ultimate* is the only version Microsoft should have sold and, if you can afford it, this is the version you should buy. No features are held back. Ultimate is $220 (upgrade) or $320 (new).
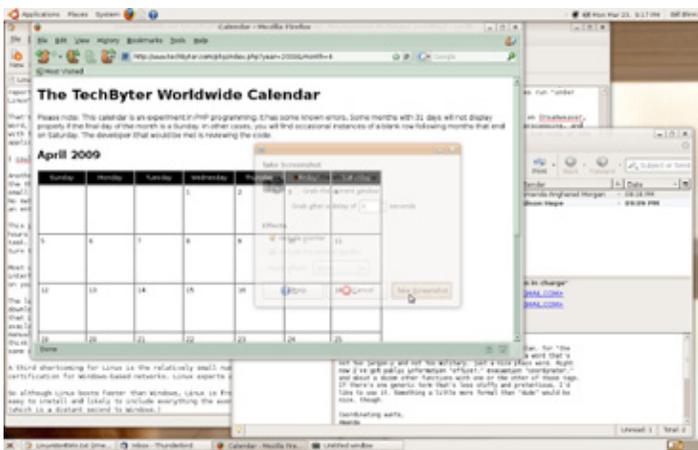
Upgrading from XP or Vista

If your computer is running XP, you must perform a clean installation if you want to upgrade to Windows 7. If your computer is running Vista, you should be able to upgrade in place, but I probably wouldn't. A "clean installation" no longer means that you must format the hard drive, though, and Microsoft has a sophisticated upgrade tool that works well.

Law of Cat Transparency: Because cats are transparent they can sit directly in front of the TV screen.

A computer that was able to run Vista will almost certainly be able to run Windows 7. And if your computer was able to run XP, it probably will be able to run Windows 7. You should plan on confirming that the video subsystem has enough power for Aero, though.

In fact, it's a good idea to take your computer to the Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor. You'll find information on Microsoft's website.

The advisor will tell you whether your system meets the hardware requirements, which it probably will. More important, it will list any known compatibility problems. The key word in that sentence is "known". You can still encounter problems that haven't yet been discovered.

A "clean" installation will create a windows.old directory that contains the *Windows* folder and other critical files from *Documents and Settings* and from *Program Files*. Data files should survive the process, too, but only a fool would proceed without a full and verified backup.

Would You Like Ubuntu with That?

There couldn't be a better time to set up your computer as a dual-boot machine with Ubuntu Linux. Ubuntu is the Linux distribution that I recommend to most people because it's easy to install and plays very well with Windows. If you have more than one hard drive, Linux can boot from any drive. Visit the Ubuntu website to read about the process.

"Dual boot" may sound intimidating, but Ubuntu has made the process about as easy as it can be made.

Another consideration before you start is backup. If you think you have a full and verified backup, check to be sure. The time to find out about any shortcomings is now, not later. As much as I like online backup systems such as Carbonite, I would supplement that with a local backup to a removable USB hard drive. It's not that this is a better solution than Carbonite, but restoring data is much faster if you have the files on a local hard drive.

If you're using third-party backup software such as that from Acronis, you'll need to have the installation media available. And if you're using the Windows XP backup utility you'll need to download an application from Microsoft because the file format has changed. This utility was designed for moving files from XP to Vista and, at this moment, isn't yet certified for Windows 7.

To be absolutely certain that all of my data survives, I typically create yet another copy of really important files on another hard drive.

Because you'll need to reinstall all of your applications, now is the time to make sure that you can find all of the CDs and DVDs. I have a special downloads directory where all downloaded applications are stored. I number all CDs and DVDs, store them in devices made for discs, and record the installation keys in an Access data file.
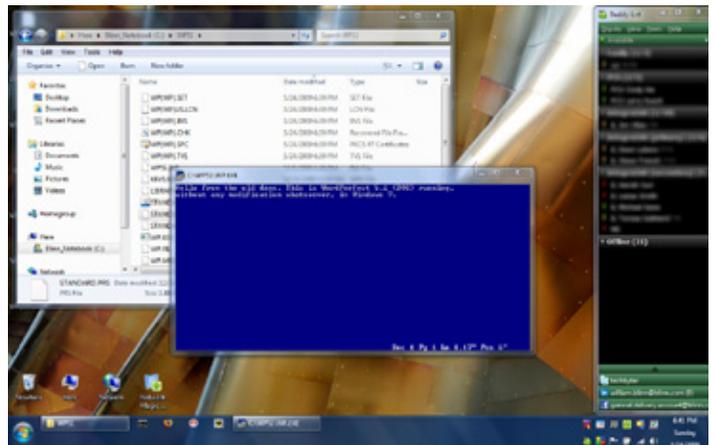
If you have applications that must be "transferred" (many Adobe applications, for example) be sure to deactivate them before you install Windows 7. You can always contact customer after the fact, but it's faster and easier if you take the appropriate steps yourself in advance of the upgrade.

Windows 7: Bottom Line

For me, the decision to move to a new operating system hinges on whether the new operating systems brings any useful new functions to bear on my daily work. Vista was sorely lacking in this regard: It was pretty, but it was also slow, crash-prone, and seemingly unable to get out of its own way.

Windows 7 is pretty. Given the choice of looking at something that's pretty or something that's not as pretty, I'll pick *pretty* every time. But an operating system must work well, too. Vista didn't. Windows 7 does.

That makes the decision an easy one.

PS: WordPerfect 5.1 Still Works

I keep one old DOS program around, partly to see if it will run under newer versions of the operating system and partly because it was my favorite word processor of all time.

Wordperfect 5.1 fit on a floppy disk. It was fast. It processed words. It offered substantial formatting for the day. (The day was 1989). After that, Wordperfect tried to move to OS/2 when the rest of the world was moving to Windows. But I'll always appreciate the capabilities Wordperfect 5.1 brought to the desktop.

Does it still run under Windows 7? In a word, Yes. ß