

Windows Vista FAQ:

I'm not exactly a Microsoft super-fan. Little Billy Gates is not my hero. I've always "put up" with Windows as a necessary evil since Mac's couldn't run my many applications and the same was true with Linux. I've learned many "computer languages" like COBOL, C, C+, C++, FORTRAN, Assembler, and good old Basic at BCIT in the 70's and the last 30+ years of my career. I sure don't want to learn another one at my age. Microsoft has had 2 "hits" in a row first with XP and now Vista. I was very skeptical about Vista and most of my Clients' and friends have been resisting the change for quite a while now. Microsoft asked me to Beta Test Vista and I do have the beta CD's they sent me – still in the original wrappers. I tried it on one test machine and it was so buggy I thought Windows ME had risen from the dead.

Once envisioned as a minor upgrade to Windows XP, Windows Vista (formerly codenamed "Longhorn") first took on all-new importance in early 2002 when Microsoft decided to reach for the brass ring and make this upcoming Windows release an all-encompassing major upgrade with new security architecture, a hardware 3D-enabled user interface, and many more exciting new features. Windows Vista is still the most impressive Windows upgrade in well over a decade. Remember Windows ME? Windows Millennium was a disaster – believed to have died on 911! Well here's the first--and most comprehensive--Windows Vista/Longhorn FAQ ever created, constantly updated to include the latest information about this exciting release.

Q: What is Windows Vista?

A: Windows Vista is the name of the next major version of Windows, and the successor to Windows XP (*ed: THEY WISH*).

Q: What's with the name? I figured Windows Vista would be called Windows 2007 or something.

A: You and me both. However, Microsoft has somewhat painted itself into a corner by choosing names like Windows Me and Windows XP for the two prior client releases of Windows. Now, it has to try and outdo itself with each product version's name; otherwise, people would consider it to be a boring release. Certainly, Windows 2007 sounds less exciting than Windows XP.

That said, Microsoft tells me that Windows Vista delivers a "personal vista" for all who use it. "We live in a world of more information, more ways to communicate, and more things to do," Microsoft Group Product Manager Greg Sullivan told me the morning that Microsoft revealed the Windows Vista branding. "You want the PC to adapt to you and help you cut through the clutter to focus on what's important to you. That's what Windows Vista is all about: bringing clarity to your world, so you can focus on what matters to you."

Microsoft notes that Windows has always empowered people to use technology to do and accomplish what they want. But the world has evolved, and there's a lot more out there. Windows Vista will address those changes.

"I love this name. 'Vista' creates the right imagery for the

new product capabilities and inspires the imagination with all the possibilities of what can be done with Windows -- making people's passions come alive."

--Jim Allchin, group vice president, Platforms Management
at Microsoft

Q: Did Microsoft consider other names?

A: Yes. I'm told that the company had a list of a half dozen names that reached the final round of consideration. Microsoft considered everything from simple numbers ("Windows Seven" or "Windows 07") or letters (like XP) to fanciful, inventive names, including words that don't exist today. In the end, Microsoft wanted to describe the value proposition of Windows Vista with its name.

Microsoft executives tested a number of potential names with focus groups and then finally presented its choice to group senior vice president Jim Allchin, who approved it. In the end, the company believes that the Windows Vista name is a "wonderful intersection of what the product really does, what Windows stands for, and what resonates with customers, and their needs."

Q: What's with all this "connected," "clear," "confident" stuff I've heard about?

A: As always, Microsoft needs to summarize any product using three simple points, and with Windows Vista, those three points are "connected," "clear," and "confident". Here's what the company means by this:

Connected. Windows Vista seamlessly connects you with the people, information and devices you need to interact with, quickly and in a really straightforward way. No computer sits alone anymore, according to the company, and you're connected to the Web, and to devices, you want to contact people and to share things.

Clear. This refers both to the clarity of the user interface, which now sports a glass-like sheen that is called Windows Aero (Business+ editions), and to the ways in which Windows Vista lets you more clearly access your own information. Instead of making you adapt to the way the computer structures data, Windows Vista is far more dynamic, and far more personal. "Windows Vista introduces clear ways to organize and use your information to focus on what matters to you," Sullivan said.

Confidence. Thanks to spyware and other electronic threats, ID theft, phishing scams, etc., people don't trust their computers much anymore. Windows Vista gives people more confidence in their PC and their ability to get more out of it. Microsoft tells me it has "taken care of things" and made things more discoverable in Windows Vista. "It enables a new level of confidence in the security and reliability of your PC and in your ability to get the most out of it," Sullivan said.

Q: These are nice sound bites, but how does this market points reflect actual features in the product?

A: Here are some correlations between actual Windows Vista features and the marketing points:

Connected. Windows Vista includes numerous enhancements for portable computers, including better power management, support for external displays, and better wireless networking functionality.

Clear. Windows Vista includes system-level instant desktop search functionality that helps users find information on their PCs and organize them with virtual folders that work the way they want them to. Windows Vista also makes it easier to identify documents from their icons: Instead of using static icons like previous Windows versions, Windows Vista features Live Icons that display the first page of the document right in its icon. Finally, Windows Vista will include an advanced printer and document framework called XPS (XML Paper Specification, see below) that will reportedly make it easier to use and share documents between wide varieties of devices.

Confidence. Windows Vista includes integrated anti-malware defenses that will shield users from spyware, adware, phishing attacks, and other electronic threats. The system also includes a Secure Startup feature to ensure that the data on PCs stays protected, even if the machine is lost or stolen. BitLocker full volume encryption, using a hardware component to store encryption keys, keeps user data inaccessible to thieves as well. Finally, and perhaps most important, Windows Vista features User Account Protection (UAP, formerly called Limited User Account), a reduced privileges mode that prevents even admins from running in administrative mode normally, giving you better defense against electronic attacks. With UAP enabled--the default--you need to supply an admin password any time you make a change that could affect the system. This is similar to the way Mac OS X and Linux already work. In fact with every new feature Microsoft releases they steal more & more ideas from MAC, Firefox and others. Firefox had "tabbed browsing" long before it was a twinkle in Billy's eye.

Q: I heard that Windows Vista was based on Windows Server 2003, not XP. Does that mean that Windows Vista is more stable/less consumer-friendly than XP?

A: Future Windows versions will always be based on the most up-to-date Windows version at the time, and at the time that Microsoft reset Longhorn development and began work on what we now know as Windows Vista, that version was Windows Server 2003 with Service Pack 1 (SP1). When Windows Vista development originally started in 2001, however, it was then based on Windows XP. In mid-2004, Microsoft had to restart the core development of Windows Vista because it was too hard to go back and componentized the existing Windows Vista core code. So when it restarted Windows Vista development, Microsoft naturally used the Windows Server 2003 with SP1 code base instead of that of XP.

Don't be confused by this: Windows Vista still includes all of the great features and compatibility from XP with Service Pack 2 (SP2). As Microsoft writes in its internal documentation, the company is simply taking the best features of both XP with Service Pack 2 (SP2) and Windows Server 2003 with SP1 to create Windows Vista.

Q: Is Windows Vista more secure than Windows XP?

A: Yes. Windows Vista builds on the security features in Windows XP with Service Pack 2 (SP2) and Windows Server 2003 with Service Pack 1 (SP1) and adds some deep-seated security improvements that will finally make the Windows platform competitive with Linux and Mac OS X from a security standpoint. With Windows Vista, the system will inform users about security and privacy choices so they feel more confident that they are as secure as possible, and that their privacy is protected. The question, of course, is whether Windows Vista will be more immune to security threats than was XP. Only time will tell.

Q: I thought Windows XP Service Pack 2 (SP2) was such a big deal for security. Why is Windows Vista changing security so much?

A: As Microsoft has said repeatedly, security is an ongoing process. The original architecture of Windows XP and Vista--that is, Windows NT--debuted in 1990, well over 15 years ago. At that time, the Internet wasn't widely available, TCP/IP wasn't the most-frequently-used networking paradigm, and the number of connected PCs and servers worldwide was tiny. Since then, Windows has come of age in a connected world that requires new protection strategies over time. In many ways, the security improvements in Windows Vista are long-overdue, and are very similar to security features available already in Linux and Mac OS X. However, in some cases, the security improvements in Windows Vista are simply evolutions of the technologies Microsoft first debuted in Windows XP and in XP SP2.

Q: Is Windows Vista designed more for home consumers or business users?

A: Microsoft says that Windows Vista is a significant release for all 600+ million Windows users, regardless of whether they use Windows at home or at work. While this is no doubt true, and there are excellent security and deployment improvements in Windows Vista that will benefit business users, it's pretty clear to everyone that Windows Vista's most exciting changes are on the home-consumer side. For example, the system includes excellent new versions of Windows Media Player and Windows Movie Maker, as well as new applications like Windows Photo Gallery and Windows DVD Maker.



Q: If Microsoft is making WPF, WCF, and .NET Framework 3.0 available separately from Windows Vista, doesn't that "water down" Windows Vista and make it less exciting?

A: Not necessarily. These technologies are for developers only, and don't impact the end user experience on Windows Vista at all. Most important, perhaps, Microsoft is making these technologies available to a wider audience now, so we'll see more great Windows Vista-compatible applications earlier rather than later.

What makes Windows Vista less exciting was the long wait and the dropped features first announced. Microsoft promised us this OS for several years, and with every passing year its once-phenomenal improvements seem less and less impressive. Don't misunderstand: Windows Vista is a huge Windows release and one that consumers, especially, should be excited about. But the wait, and the sheer number of features Microsoft had to drop to make its deadlines, does make Vista a bit less exciting than it could have been.

Q: Is Windows Vista a 32-bit or 64-bit operating system?

A: Virtually every Windows Vista product edition (with the exception of Home Basic) ships with both 32-bit (x86) and 64-bit (x64) versions on the same DVD. Microsoft expects the computer buying public to switch to x64 during Vista's lifetime given hardware continues its fast-changing releases trend. There will not be an Itanium version of Windows Vista.

Q: When should I consider not buying a Windows XP-based PC so I can wait for Windows Vista?

A: If you think you will be migrating to Windows Vista in the next six months or less, you should wait. You will have a much better experience getting Windows Vista on a new PC than you will if you try to upgrade from XP yourself. The alternative would be to partition your hard drive and set-up a dual-boot system using both your existing copy of XP and enjoy learning Vista at your own pace. If you can't do it yourself there are many places (including my own) that will do it for you.

According to Microsoft, however, any "PC that meets current designed for Windows XP logo requirements, has a mainstream or performance class CPU, 512MB of RAM, and a discreet graphics subsystem that will support the new Longhorn Display Driver Model (LDDM) will run [Windows Vista] very well." In my opinion, any computer built within the last 4-5 years would qualify as a candidate. I would add that a healthy upgrade of RAM would be a huge benefit to running Vista to your liking. Get as much as your motherboard will accept. You can test your system right now to determine what the issues might be. Microsoft has a kool "Vista Upgrade Advisor" that will analyze you system to see if it's compatible and make any recommendations or adjustments you mat need to make >>>

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/buyorupgrade/upgradeadvisor.aspx>.

Q: I heard that Office 2007 (the next version of Microsoft Office) was finalized around the same time as Windows Vista. Will Office 2007 only run on Windows Vista?

A: No, Office 2007 also runs on Windows XP with SP2, Windows XP x64 Edition, and Windows Server 2003 with SP1. Contrary to what many think and say, I've been able to successfully deploy Office 2003 on many Vista machines. The only thing that doesn't migrate well is Outlook. Outlook Express has been replaced by "Windows Mail".

Q: Windows Vista sounds interesting. I'd like to know more.

A: Not surprisingly, you're in the right place. Swing by my [Windows Vista Center](#) for links to other Windows Vista content I'm creating [www.pcmedix.ca]. Look for the links to "Vista".