

Windows Vista



Get Ready!

A guide to Microsoft's forthcoming operating system
for home users

(UK Edition)

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INTRODUCTION

This document is intended as a rough guide to the benefits up upgrading your PC to the new version of Windows Vista for home users, when it is released to consumers on January 30th 2007. I have been beta testing Windows Vista for over a year and am extremely familiar with the product. Here I want to detail the reasons why I think it would be beneficial for you to upgrade.

WHICH VERSION SHOULD I BUY?

For the home user, Vista will come in three flavours...

- **Home Basic** – This version does not include features that you will probably want, including the swanky glass aero interface, DVD authoring, Media Centre and the ability to auto-synchronise with third-party devices such as MP3 players and Windows Mobile devices. This version will retail for approximately £154.99 in the UK. I would not recommend this version.
- **Home Premium** – This is the version you will probably want to go for. It includes all of the functionality you will require including everything mentioned above. This version will retail for approximately £189.99.
- **Ultimate** – The top of the tree version of Vista includes everything listed above, plus advanced security controls (including the new BitLocker drive encryption system that I will speak about later). Vista Ultimate will also include a feature called “Ultimate Extras” which will be free membership of a club that will offer preferential support and free software, and is also rumoured to offer free music and video downloads. This version will retail for approximately £325.
- **64 Bit Editions** – we’ll talk about these later on in this document.

THIS IS VERY EXPENSIVE, CAN I GET IT CHEAPER?

This will be the question you are asking most. The current pricing that is listed does not include the *upgrade* editions which will cost approximately half of the figures quoted above. You will qualify for an upgrade install if you already own a Windows XP install CD (*please note that if you have an XP Home or pro ‘upgrade’ edition, you will not qualify for a Vista Upgrade edition*).

In addition to this there will be a new feature in all versions of Vista except Vista Ultimate called *Anytime Upgrade* that will allow you to upgrade from one version to another in-situ over the internet.

All versions of Windows Vista come on the same DVD, so you already have all the versions of the operating system (OS). Microsoft will simply sell you a different product key online and

then the additional components of Windows Vista can be installed from your existing DVD. I have yet to see this feature working but it's a very nice idea.

It will be almost impossible to install and run a pirate copy of Vista and I would not suggest that anybody try.

If you are considering buying a new PC then I'd suggest you hold off until then as you will have Vista pre-installed, most probably home premium, on it from January.

SO WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT EXTRA SECURITY?

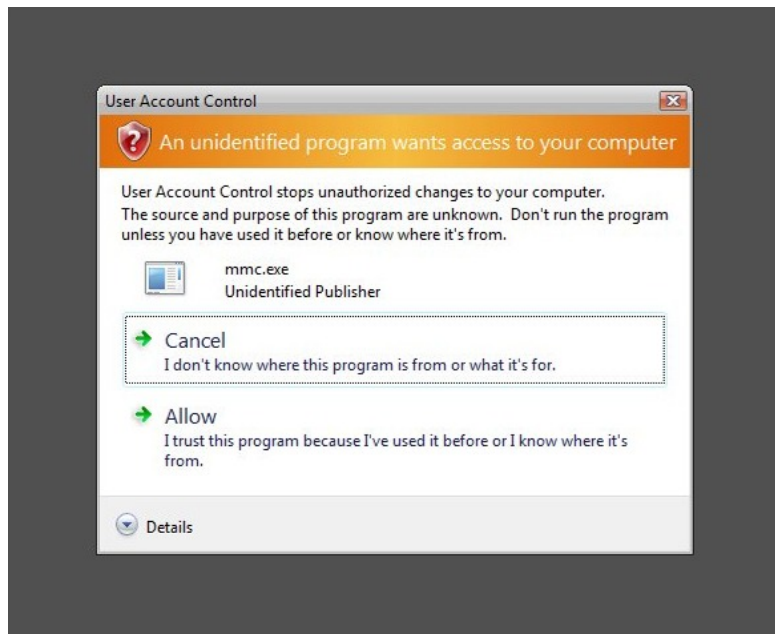
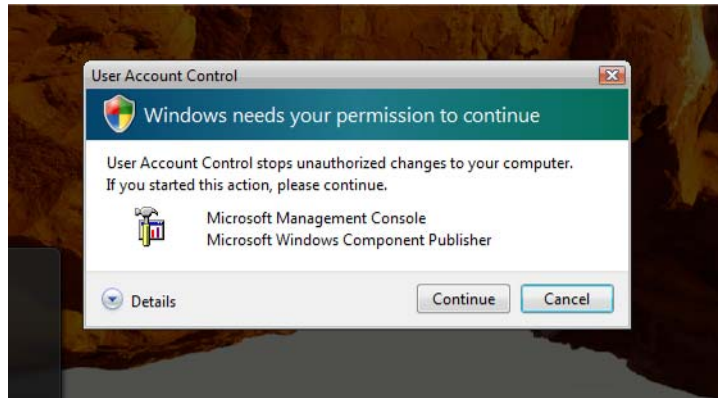
Security in Windows Vista has been significantly beefed up. New features include...

- A two-way firewall that blocks outgoing, as well as incoming, traffic
- The new *Windows Defender* Spyware detection and removal software
- A special protected mode for Internet Explorer 7 that denies the browser access to the OS. This will help prevent attacks.
- Bitlocker hard drive encryption (only available in *Vista Ultimate*). For those of you who keep sensitive or commercial data on your PC this will prevent anyone reading it. The data is either locked by a chip on your motherboard (you will need a new compatible PC for this and this will only work if the hard drive is removed) or by other methods such as using a USB flash drive as a key that your PC will not start without.
- User Account Control (UAC) has been much talked about in the press and I feel it's a wonderful system for protecting the operating system against attack.

USER ACCOUNT CONTROL

In every version of Windows through to XP the default user was an *administrator*, in that they could change any and all aspects of the operating system. This was a boon to virus and spyware writers and hackers. Sometimes the first indication many people had that their PC had been compromised was when it suddenly stopped working!

UAC changes all that by making all users a *standard user* instead and popping up a dialog box on a darkened screen that will tell you when any piece of software is wanting to change something in the OS, and asking your permission (see below).



Initially many people have complained that UAC is intrusive and pops-up too often. In my experience this is true while you are configuring Windows to be the way you want it. However after that it will only pop-up occasionally and personally gives me a feeling of added security.

SECURITY CENTRE

First introduced with XP Service Pack 2, this has been upgraded to integrate Windows Vista's new anti-spyware tool *Windows Defender*. Support has also been included for third-party anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall companies to plug their software directly into the security centre, making your PC security clearer and more centralised.

PARENTAL CONTROLS

For those of you who may want the feature, the new parental controls give a great deal of protection including...

- The times of day and days of week a PC can be used
- Parental control not only of your main PC, but also of other PCs in your home remotely
- The games that can be played on the PC by age rating (more about games later)

SO THE SECURITY'S BEEFED UP! WHAT ABOUT THE STEEP LEARNING CURVE?

Windows Vista is a very different looking beast to XP, but it's nowhere near as hard to use as you may think.

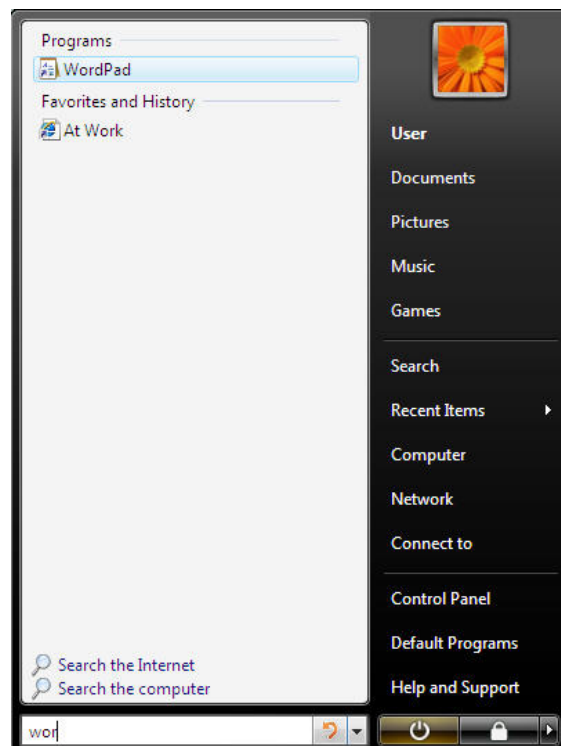
There are many new features that make it far easier to use if anything. These include...

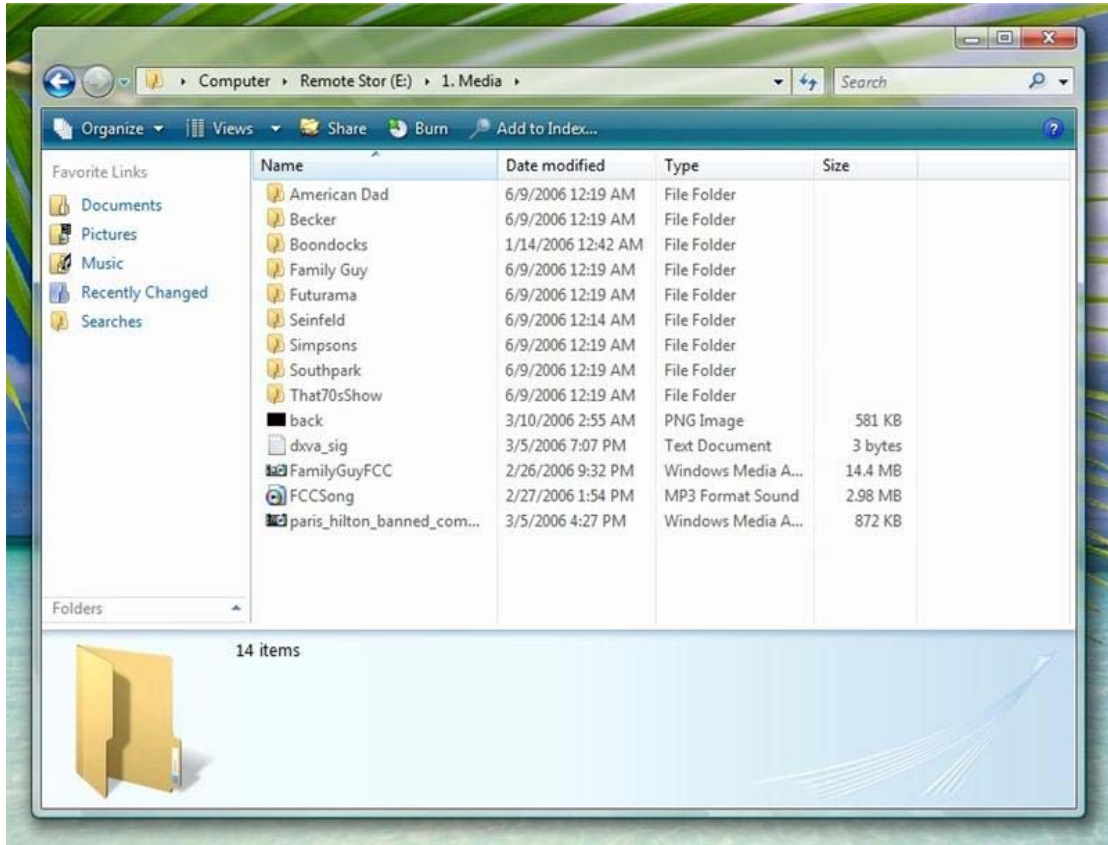
- **Expanded Search facilities.** Search is now everywhere from the start menu into every aspect of the OS from explorer windows to Media Player etc.

The new search facility is near instant in returning your results and is far more configurable with multiple search criteria should you require it, and the ability to search within more document types than XP was able to.

In addition you are now able to save your searches for later use. These *saved searches* dynamically update themselves the next time you open them to make sure they're always up to date. They can even be used to replace folders that you may create (Spreadsheets or documents about your Dad etc.)

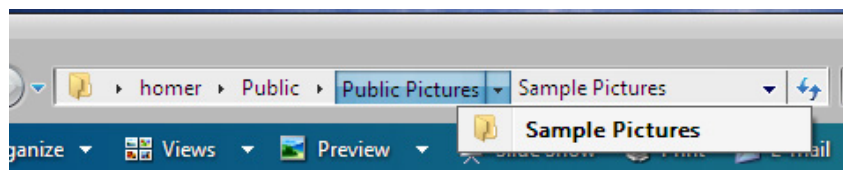
- **Revamped Explorer views** give a much clearer and easier way to find your documents.





There are several new features within this new explorer view...

- The left hand pane now includes a list of your favourite links and folders on your PC. It is well worth dragging and dropping new folders and drives into this panel as it's a great time saver.
- The Breadcrumb Trail replaces the traditional explorer address bar in features such as Computer (The My moniker has now been dropped from Documents, Pictures etc.)



This makes it far easier to navigate around your files and folders.

- The preview pane along the bottom of the window shows you detailed information about the file, folder or drive you have selected. Information includes author, creation/modified date, size, and allows you to see and change things such as a personal rating for the file (one to five stars, a feature brought over from Windows Media Player).

PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENTS

Windows Vista installs, loads and runs faster than any previous version of the operating system.

- Installation now takes only half an hour or less. Vista will ask you the few pertinent questions it needs at the very beginning of the installation and then simply gets on with it.
- Vista is far better at setting all of your regional settings than any previous version of Windows. This means you won't end up with an American keyboard layout for instance when you live in the UK.
- Driver support is greatly improved with Vista recognising more hardware on install than ever before. There are issues with some 64 bit drivers, but we will come to those later.
- For those people who want to expand the memory on their PC, commonly known as the cheapest and best way to get an immediate performance increase, you can now simply plug in a USB pen drive and use that as extra memory. You can even leave it there for Windows to use next time you start the machine.

ACCESSIBILITY

For those people who have difficulty looking at small text and icons on the screen, accessibility in Windows Vista has been greatly improved.

The entire desktop space is now scaleable allowing you to change the font and icon sizes without having to change your resolution (lowering your resolution on a flat screen monitor can result in a fuzzy image).

There are a whole host of usability upgrades in Vista including Braille support that make it far easier to use.

PHOTO AND PICTURE SUPPORT

- The digital camera import wizard now rotates your digital photos automatically as it imports them from your camera. In addition to this it allows you to add titles and search terms to your photos.
- A new application, *Photo Gallery*, is the new centre from which you view and modify your digital photos and pictures. It includes many of the facilities found in commercial packages such as cropping, rotating, editing, and has an excellent red-eye removal tool. In addition it allows you to add ratings (one to five stars) to your photos and also to add search terms (metadata) to them.

MAINTAINING YOUR PC

- The disk defragmenter, used by many people to help keep good performance on their PC has been much improved. It will now run happily in the background while you are working and also now includes an auto-schedule function. This means you can set it to run periodically in the background so you never need to do it manually.
- A new backup facility replaces the ageing Windows Backup of previous versions. The new software has automatic-scheduling and the ability to back up to CD, DVD, USB attached drives and other computers across your network.
- Windows Update is also now smarter and easier to use. Not reliant on Internet Explorer any more, it is faster and better at helping keep your PC up to date.

64 BIT SUPPORT

More and more PCs now have faster 64-bit processors in them. All flavours of Windows Vista come with 64-bit versions on a different 64-bit version DVD.

The 64-bit version of Vista is inherently more secure, however this does come at a cost and you may find that some of your hardware does not work. If you install any hardware that pops up a window telling you that "this driver has not passed Windows logo testing to verify it's compatibility...". it will simply not install *at all* in Windows Vista 64-bit edition.

Driver signing is an important part of maintaining a stable and secure operating system. It is also essential for protecting your PC against attacks by viruses and hackers.



Most companies will happily pay the small fee to Microsoft required to verify that their drivers are fully compatible with their operating systems, other companies however are not prepared to pay this money.

We can expect this to be a short-term problem as these new security features will force hardware manufacturers to pay to get their drivers signed. This will mean downloading new drivers from the manufacturers' website however as and when they become available.

If you are running the 64-bit version of Windows and buying new hardware, look for the "Designed for Windows Vista" logo on the box. This will tell you that the drivers have been signed and verified.

If you are asking why this security feature was not implemented into the 32-bit versions of Windows Vista, it is simply because Microsoft caved-in to many manufacturers on this occasion. The next generation operating system from Microsoft however will not allow unsigned drivers. Remember, to guarantee full compatibility with no problems, always look for the "Designed for Windows..." logo.

GAMING ENHANCEMENTS

If you are a PC gamer then you'll be pleased to hear that Windows Vista has been designed from the ground up as a gaming platform. There are a number of technologies brought over from the Xbox 360 along with many new controls and enhancements.

There are, however, some things that gamers may not be so fond of. The complete list of new gaming pros and cons is...

- When you buy an Xbox or Playstation game in the shops you will see the appropriate console logo in a band across the top of the box. This will also now apply to PC games. Any game that carries this new **"Games for Windows"** branding is tested and guaranteed to work properly with Windows Vista.
- The new *gaming centre*, accessed from the start menu, is the hub for all your games. You can launch them from here, access saved game positions, view details about the game such as its age rating and the console will also tell you when updates and patches are available for many of them. The gaming centre will also download the cover-art for your games automatically. Any game that has the **"Games for Windows"** logo bar across the top of the box (described above) will automatically plug itself into the gaming centre.
- DirectX 10 is the new version of the 3D graphics engine for Windows Vista and offers huge advances over its predecessor. Microsoft have no plans to release DirectX 10 for Windows XP and in the future, probably twelve months or so from now, all the latest games will no doubt require it. Unfortunately, in order to get the most out of the new features you will need a DirectX 10 compatible graphics card, and for many this will mean upgrading your hardware. If you're serious about gaming then it may be worth waiting until you buy a new PC that comes with Vista, and a DirectX 10 compatible graphics card installed.
- Windows Vista will work with any network connected Xbox 360 consoles you have so that players on both machines can play on-line and other games together.

SO WHAT ELSE COMES WITH VISTA?

Windows Vista is absolutely loaded with new and upgraded software...

- Windows Vista now supports playing DVD movies straight out of the box with no need to install any third-party software!
- New games include an excellent 3D chess, Mah-jong, Purple Palace for young children, and significant upgrades to Minesweeper and Solitaire.
- A new calendar application is included to help you remember what needs doing when. It's a surprisingly comprehensive application that allows you to colour-code your appointments for easy reference and also allows you to share your calendar with friends and family on-line, all the while keeping private appointments hidden from anyone but yourself.

- Windows Media Player 11 and Internet Explorer 7 are significant improvements on their predecessors and are also available for Windows XP with the same feature set. This is with the sole exception of IE's new protected mode that I mentioned earlier, that will not be available in Windows XP.
- Windows Media Centre has had a significant upgrade and while not everybody will like it as much as the last version, it is faster, slicker and more responsive. It also now supports Cable TV tuners, up to four installed tuners at a time and has extra support for HD TV.
- Any Xbox 360 console in your home can act as a Media Centre Extender, allowing you to watch recorded and live TV, and play music and video from your PC on the console. This feature is available in Vista Home Premium and Ultimate editions, and is also available in Windows XP Media Centre Edition 2005.
- Windows Movie Maker now supports the facility to make your own DVD movies and HD video.
- Windows Mail, previously called Outlook Express, now supports spam and phishing filtering which will come as a welcome relief to many people. However the improvements end there and, especially if you use Hotmail, the *Windows Live Mail* software that Microsoft will offer as a free download is a far better choice.
- There is a new *Welcome Centre* in Vista that will appear after installation. This will allow you to perform tasks such as installing any hardware drivers that did not install previously, change many user settings such as your display options and download additional software like *Windows Live Mail* and *Live Messenger*. Please note that with this release there is no messenger software installed by default, but the new *Windows Live Messenger* is a very small download.

BUT MY PC IS QUITE OLD NOW, WILL I BE ABLE TO RUN IT?

I've not spoken here about the new aero glass interface in too much detail as I didn't want to distract you from the important features I've detailed within this document.

Microsoft have provided a *Upgrade Advisor* for Windows XP that you can download from www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready

This will tell you about any potential problems with your hardware and software, to give you plenty of time to get updates and fixes from the appropriate manufacturers websites. It will also tell you if your PC can run the glass Aero interface (most modern PCs will happily be able to run this) or the only slightly less attractive Aero Basic.

SUMMARY

There are absolutely loads of new funky and exciting features in Windows Vista that I'm sure end-users will love. These include...

- Live pop-up thumbnails of windows when you hover your mouse cursor over the window titles on the task bar across the bottom of the screen.
- Live thumbnails also being used in the Alt-TAB task switcher and a 3D version being available on the Windows key and TAB.
- Less clutter with many drop-down menus removed where they're not necessary. These menus can be displayed by simply pressing the Alt key whenever you need them.
- Better stability and performance than in any previous version of Windows.
- The new *sidebar* allows you to display custom gadgets (clocks, calendars, RSS news feeds etc.) either on the bar or dropped onto the desktop.
- Support for mini-displays on the front of new laptops that can keep you informed about new email, battery charge and more.
- A connected approach that makes it easier to find your files amongst all the clutter of the modern PC.
- An updated collapsible start menu that doesn't hog all your screen with sub-menus and is easier to use and navigate.
- The complete lack of annoying features such as the 'My' moniker on folders, the annoying dog in search and gone is the Tellytubbies, cartoon'esque look and feel.
- Improved networking features allow you to see other computers on your network and connect to wireless networks faster and more securely.

This document has been written with the home user in mind. For business there are even more compelling features such as the ability to block the use of USB flash drives to prevent people stealing sensitive data, and peer-to-peer meeting collaboration software. There is a great deal of information about these features on the internet at websites like www.WinSuperSite.com and Microsoft's own website, www.Microsoft.com.

SO IF I REALLY WANT IT, WHERE DO I GET IT FROM?

The cheapest route is always to wait until you upgrade your existing PC. So long as you are careful about what you click on on-line, and have adequate anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall protection that you keep up-to-date, Windows XP is perfectly fine.

You will be able to buy Windows Vista on the high street from many shops including Game, Curry's Digital and PC World. You may be able to save some money however by buying online from websites such as www.Scan.co.uk or www.Amazon.co.uk. Beware of any cheap versions available on websites like EBay!

For more information on Windows Vista visit Microsoft on the internet at www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready.

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