



## Should You Upgrade To Windows Vista?

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Being on the PMPA IT Committee, I am often asked about my opinion on emerging technologies. This year at PMTS 2007, the main topic seemed to be about upgrading to Windows Vista.

When someone approaches me for my opinion, first I get the look. You know the one—the vaguely wary, slightly shocked look that comes with the thought of the daunting task of changing operating

systems across a network. As a self-described “gear head” with a love of new technology and an almost unhealthy awe for new hardware, I must confess that I feel the wariness, too.

My first impression always is, “I want that!” But that is my inner geek speaking. I must always temper my feelings with what is best for my company and my network users. Evaluating what you need while planning for the future helps you make good technology decisions. Knowing that there will be system downtime, no matter how small, has to be considered, as well as the expense, ROI, support and maintenance.

Many companies have IT staffs and test environments that make most of this moot, but I have never had that luxury. Some companies outsource their IT needs, but who wants to pay consultants to test and learn a new operating system while they deploy it in your environment? Knowledge is power, as they say, so let’s take a brief look at Vista

and see what you need—or don’t.

Microsoft offers Vista in five different packages:

- Ultimate – The most complete version
- Enterprise – Meets the needs of large, global organizations with complex IT infrastructures
- Business – Designed to meet the needs of small- and medium-sized businesses
- Home Premium – The preferred edition for home desktop and mobile PCs
- Home Basic – For basic computing needs like e-mail, browsing the Internet and viewing photos

For the sake of this article, I am going to look at Vista Business for our desktops and take Microsoft’s word for it that Home Premium is the edition we need for our laptops.

Let me step back for a moment and say that if you have never visited the Microsoft Web site ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)), do it now. There are so many free, helpful tools to assist you on planning for and using any Microsoft technology, that you might become addicted.

**Vista Business offers these features to consider:**

- Greater security than previous versions
- Enhanced desktop search and organization capabilities that help locate files and e-mail messages on your PC. If you remember anything about a file (the type of file, when it was

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created or what it contains), Vista can find it for you.

- A sleek new interface (not as awe-inspiring as going from DOS to Windows, but nice)
- Windows Meeting Space to collaborate and share documents
- Easier network connectivity from your home and office
- MSRP full package \$299, upgrade \$199

My mantra is, "Purchase something that works with what you already have."

Vista Business also supports your 64-bit hardware. What does that mean to you exactly? The 64-bit processors are for serious computer users who have advanced high-performance needs. They are ideal for engineering (CAD/CAM) work, digital content creation, scientific/technical computing and even demanding financial analysis.

Vista Business will help support these needs provided that you

have the correct 64-bit drivers and that all of your applications support 64 bit before you install the operating system (otherwise, you'll have a mess on your hands). What Microsoft doesn't tell you is that some of your 32-bit drivers won't work on Vista, and that some CAD/CAM providers will not support the product if you migrate. Therefore, research is important here.

There are also memory requirements. Microsoft recommends 1 GB of RAM, but in my experience, I have found that one should always double the minimum requirement to get the performance needed.

Whenever a new operating system is launched, there is going to be bugs in it. That's because developers cannot possibly test for every single scenario and interaction that could arise, even with Beta testing. Let the IT departments that have test environments work those bugs out. My recommendation is not to upgrade to a new operating system until Service Pack 2 has been issued. If you wait until Service Pack 2 is available, you will be bringing on a stable operating

system while reducing headaches across your network.

My final thought: Beware of software providers that claim to be on the "cutting edge" (sometimes known as the "bleeding edge") of technology. What this often means is that they jumped onto the next technology prior to seeing where the market is going and if there will be other software providers writing programs to work with what you already have. If you have heard me lecture, you know that my mantra is, "Purchase something that works with what you already have."

Therefore, do your research and be on the "cutting edge" (stable system, many other providers using the technology), not the "bleeding edge." And, plan on using your technology for 3 to 4 years before changing it. After Service Pack 2, Vista might be for you.

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