

Behind the Counter

Windows 7 Review

Considering Microsoft Vista's tepid performance and negative reviews, consumers are justifiably hesitant in embracing Microsoft's new operating system Windows 7. A few days of using the new OS, however, and even the most sceptical user will be wondering how they ever worked without it. Windows 7 offers a number of improvements over older versions, most notably system performance, document and device management, and navigation.

A 28% decrease in RAM usage, and a whopping 40% decrease in Disk space trims down Windows 7 considerably from Vista's bloated requirements. What this means for the user are quicker startup, sleep and resume functions with programs (especially large ones) loading noticeably faster than before. The system crashes that plagued many Vista users are now a thing of the past, and multiple documents and programs work together seamlessly and stay open until you close them down.

The new Library feature is helpful for disorganized file systems. If you need to locate a picture or document, but don't recall exactly where it was saved, the Library will automatically store a link to all similar file types in one handy place. Just open the library and all your pictures are together with your documents right next door. Windows 7 also consolidates device management, and automatically installs any required drivers as soon as a new printer, camera, scanner, etc, is plugged in. For users with multiple printers or cameras, a thumbnail image of your actual device stands in as the icon, making identifying the correct camera or printer a breeze.

My favourite new feature on Windows 7 is the improved navigation. Mac users might recognize the new "Aero Peek" function located on the bottom task bar. By hovering your mouse over the open file icon a thumbnail view of your open document will appear. Hover over the thumbnail and a full-size preview opens up. Other features such as "Peek", "Snap", and "Shake" let you see what's going on behind your open window, easily resize multiple windows to fill the screen, or minimize all windows except the one you want to focus on. Demonstrations on all the new features can be found on Microsoft's webpage for users wanting to get the most out of the new operating system.

Some of the Windows 7 improvements can be more annoying than beneficial. The additional keyboard shortcuts are a good example of this. While they are designed to be a time-saver, they are easy to be unintentionally engaged, especially while typing quickly. Users proficient in keyboard shortcuts might not have a problem with this.

One negative is the missing upgrade path from XP to Windows 7 if you didn't switch to Vista first. It can be quite cumbersome to upgrade an XP machine and making a backup of your entire hard drive is recommended because you will need to do a clean install. There are three editions of Windows 7 for sale: Home Premium, Professional and Ultimate. To upgrade your Vista, you must be running Vista SP1 or SP2 and have 12.9 GB of free disk space.

Although Windows 7 doesn't come with its own built in anti-virus software, security has been improved over Vista. It is now easier to set up the firewall for your home network. The calculator in the accessories section has been upgraded to add statistics and programmer modes and you can now cut and paste from it. It also has a history feature so you won't have to re-enter data that you had entered previously. It now also includes templates for gas mileage, mortgage estimates and leases.

For anyone considering upgrading their operating system, or XP holdouts, Windows 7 is a great way to go. 7 is a real improvement over Vista, and promises to let you work with your computer, rather than against it. For more information on Windows 7 or how it compares to previous versions, go to <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-7/>.

This article was contributed by Liz Demer, an employee of Banka & Company Inc., owned by Gabriele Banka, DAcc., CGA, BBA Appl. We are simply certified and you can reach us at 250-763-4528 or info@bankaco.com.