

# SELECTION ADVICE

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## To Vista or not to Vista? Wait for Windows 7

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Many Windows shops are asking what the best strategy is for a Windows 7 upgrade. Info-Tech is seeing most enterprises hanging tight with Windows XP SP2 or SP3 and waiting for Windows 7 – skipping Windows Vista altogether. This is the correct course of action. Enterprises should wait for Windows 7 wherever possible.

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## Executive Summary

Is there any good reason to migrate from a stable, widely supported, Windows OS in favor of a Windows OS that requires new hardware, is more challenging to manage, and does not perform as well as its predecessor? The answer is clearly no! But how much better is Windows 7 than Vista? This research note will examine:

- » Windows 7 options and what hardware it will run on.
- » Windows 7 versions and which ones will be appropriate for business.
- » Why Windows 7 is worth waiting for.

Windows 7 is a significant improvement over Vista. While the kernel is largely unchanged, Microsoft has made Windows 7 a much more usable OS than Vista.



## Selection Point

One of the most frequent questions Info-Tech fields from clients relates to timing an OS upgrade. Specifically, clients are asking whether they should upgrade to Windows Vista, or wait for Windows 7. Info-Tech typically advises clients to forego Vista entirely and wait for Windows 7. Most clients have no compelling reason to migrate from Windows XP to Vista on the desktop.

In challenging economic times, many enterprises are trying to get an extra year or two out of their workstations. Few, if any, complain about XP's performance. On the other hand, many complain about Vista – even with significantly beefed-up hardware. Windows 7 is not a panacea, but it is an OS that seems poised to perform well on lesser hardware – much like its older sibling, Windows XP.

## Key Selection Criteria

### *Decisions, Decisions*

The first decision point is to determine whether or not to upgrade to Vista between XP and Windows 7. Some enterprises have already made this decision, but some are still considering it. If the decision has been made either way – a Vista migration is underway or has already been completed, or XP will remain the single desktop OS until Windows 7 is released – a decision will have to be made about when to begin the migration to Windows 7.

At this point, Info-Tech recommends XP shops hang on until Windows 7 is released. Introducing Vista at this point will significantly complicate a migration to Windows 7. The primary reason is that for a period of time IT may have to support 3 desktop operating systems – XP, Vista, and Windows 7. By cutting out Vista altogether, IT will likely have only 2 desktop operating systems to support.

The second decision point is when to upgrade to Windows 7. For those enterprises that have begun a migration to Vista, complete the migration before introducing Windows 7. For those enterprises that have completed a migration to Vista, the move to Windows 7 may be through attrition over a period of several years.

If there is a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement with Software Assurance in place, enterprises that have completed a migration to Vista may choose to expedite the migration to Windows 7. This is particularly true if IT is having problems with Vista, or if users have expressed dissatisfaction with the OS. Table 1 below outlines scenarios and timelines for a Windows 7 migration.



**Table 1. Windows 7 Upgrade Scenarios and Timelines**

Source: Info-Tech Research Group

Current Situation	Options	Timeline
All XP – waiting for Windows 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Begin testing now with Windows 7 Release Candidate 1 (RC1). Test further with the final version. Begin implementation when application and hardware testing is complete. Pay particular attention to testing peripherals like printers, scanners, and cameras to ensure driver compatibility.</li><li>» Begin testing with RC1. If application and hardware testing is satisfactory, begin migration when Windows 7 ships (scheduled for October 22, 2009).</li><li>» If the migration timeline can be reduced to 12-18 months, consider waiting for Service Pack 1 (SP1) likely in Q2/Q3 2010.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Migration through attrition (replacing desktops in the regular refresh cycle) is not likely the best option. A 4 year refresh will leave XP in production until 2013-2014 pushing up against the <a href="#"><u>Extended Support Retirement Date</u></a>. Additionally, application vendors will likely stop building and supporting applications on XP beginning in 2011-2012.</li><li>» Accelerated migration over 18-24 months is recommended. Evaluate desktop hardware to ensure compatibility.</li></ul>
Vista migration underway but not complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» It is likely best to complete the Vista migration prior to moving to Windows 7. This will avoid supporting 3 desktop operating systems.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Timing is dependent on how far along the Vista migration is, and the urgency to implement Windows 7. If the Vista migration is completed prior to beginning a move to Windows 7, support should not be a concern. Vista will likely have mainstream support through 2012-2013 and extended support through 2016-2018.</li></ul>



**Table 1. Windows 7 Upgrade Scenarios and Timelines (Continued)**

Source: Info-Tech Research Group

Current Situation	Options	Timeline
Vista migration underway but not complete (Continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» If Vista has been problematic and a quick move to Windows 7 is desired, consider stopping the Vista migration and move desktops with Vista installed to Windows 7 when it ships. Then migrate remaining XP desktops through attrition if possible.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» If the Vista migration is halted and those desktops are migrated to Windows 7 first, the 18-24 month timeline for the remaining XP desktops to move to Windows 7 should be followed.</li></ul>
Vista migration complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» If a Vista migration is complete and the OS is functioning adequately, a migration to Windows 7 can happen through attrition.</li><li>» If Vista is problematic, or an accelerated migration to Windows 7 is desired, migration can begin when Windows 7 ships. If this is the case, begin testing applications and hardware now with RC1. The majority of applications that run on Vista will run on Windows 7, and hardware currently running Vista will almost certainly support Windows 7.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» If the Windows 7 migration begins in 2010 through attrition, it should be complete by 2014-2015.</li><li>» The move to Windows 7 from Vista can be accelerated at whatever pace the enterprise desires. The 18-24 month migration does not apply here.</li></ul>

One thing to keep in mind for those migrating directly from XP to Windows 7 is that Microsoft is not supporting an upgrade path. This is standard practice for Microsoft, as they typically only support an upgrade path from the previous Windows release (in this case Vista).



This means that if Windows 7 is being installed on current XP desktops, it will have to be a clean install. Settings will be lost and applications will have to be reinstalled. Microsoft may come under pressure to provide a stand-alone tool to assist XP to Windows 7 migrations, but the capability will not be baked into Windows 7. A third party migration solution such as [LapLink](#) is an option. In addition, Windows 7 has XP compatibility mode which is a virtual machine that runs a Windows XP instance within Windows 7. This option will allow enterprises to run legacy applications that will not run in Windows 7 natively.

## *Windows 7 Options*

Windows 7 will come in 5 flavors:

- » **Starter** – This will be the lightest version of Windows 7 and will likely find its way onto netbooks and low-end desktops and laptops.
- » **Home Premium** – As its name implies, this will likely be most commonly found on consumer-grade desktops and laptops, and possibly some netbooks.
- » **Professional** – This version will be common in SMEs that do not have a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement with Software Assurance.
- » **Ultimate** – The highest end of the OS available at the retail level will likely find its way onto high-end home and business desktops and laptops. One of the key features of Ultimate that may interest enterprise users is [BitLocker Drive Encryption](#).
- » **Enterprise** – This version of Windows 7 will be available only to enterprises that have Software Assurance. Several appealing features, such as [DirectAccess](#), [BranchCache](#), and [Enterprise Search](#) are available only in this version.

One nice feature of Windows 7 licensing is that the upgrade path from one version to the next does not require re-installation of the OS. Features and functionality are unlocked with license keys. For example, to move from Basic to Professional, one would simply enter a new license key and the Professional features would be unlocked.

An overview of features in Starter, Home Premium, Professional, and Ultimate can be found [here](#), while the Enterprise version is described [here](#). [Windows 7 system requirements](#) are actually about the same as [Vista's](#) according to Microsoft, although running Vista on the minimum hardware configuration would be sluggish at best.

Windows 7 should install and run quite well on older hardware provided all drivers are available. Windows 7 pricing will be in-line with Vista pricing, with the Home Premium version being slightly less expensive than its Vista counterpart.



## Recommendations

The Windows 7 ship date is scheduled for October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009, meaning the wait for many will soon be over. Consider the options for a Windows 7 upgrade, and proceed accordingly.

1. **If upgrading from XP be prepared to move quickly.** Enterprises that have skipped Vista should wait for Windows 7, but be prepared for an accelerated migration. Begin testing applications and hardware with Windows 7 now (using RC1) and be prepared to complete the upgrade in 18-24 months.
2. **If a Vista migration is underway consider putting it on hold.** Three options exist for enterprises that have partially completed a migration to Vista:
  - » Continue the migration through to completion, and then consider upgrading from Vista to Windows 7 through attrition in the coming years. This may be a viable option if Vista is performing well and IT and users are content with the OS.
  - » Put a hold on the Vista migration and when Windows 7 becomes available upgrade Vista machines to Windows 7 first, and then XP machines within 18-24 months. This will be the preferred option for many.
  - » Continue the migration to Vista and when Windows 7 becomes available upgrade XP machines first, and then upgrade Vista machines after. This is not ideal as IT would then have to support 3 operating systems.
3. **If the Vista migration is complete, upgrade through attrition.** Unless Vista is problematic and there is a strong desire to upgrade to Windows 7 immediately, enterprises that have completed a migration to Vista should upgrade to Windows 7 through natural attrition (the standard refresh cycle).

## Bottom Line

Many Windows shops are asking what the best strategy is for a Windows 7 upgrade. Info-Tech is seeing most enterprises hanging tight with Windows XP SP2 or SP3 and waiting for Windows 7 – skipping Windows Vista altogether. This is the correct course of action. Enterprises should wait for Windows 7 wherever possible.



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