

Service Pack I fixes numerous Vista problems



John Deans

Nine out of 10 computer users deal with the Microsoft Windows operating system every day. This information comes from a world market share analysis by Net Applications which found that 90 percent of personal computers ran some version of Microsoft Windows, 7 percent ran MacOS from Apple and the remaining 3 percent was either Linux or other.

That 90 percent Windows is further broken down to 3 percent Windows 2000, 13 percent Windows Vista, and the vast majority at 74 percent Windows XP. Windows XP is by far the most widely used and has become the most stable Microsoft operating system to date. Vista is another story.

We have talked a couple of times before about Microsoft Vista and how I classified it as a "pretty pig" since it was slow and took up way too much memory. The only good thing I saw about Vista is that its Aero graphical interface looks really cool.

Vista's rollout took forever, hardware upgrades were required, compatibility problems were numerous and it ran much

slower than Windows XP. With complaints flooding Microsoft they started shipping a free XP downgrade CDROM along with personal computers pre-installed with Vista Business.

This week I heard rumors that things were getting worse with some vendors pre-installing the XP by default and included the Vista CDROM as the second option. Though Microsoft officially says they will stop shipping Windows XP to computer vendors by June 30 of this year, I'll believe that when I see it.

Vista's saving grace just may be the major release of the first big update bundle called Vista Service Pack I (SP1) which was formally available as of March 18. This long awaited SP1 supposedly addresses numerous issues, fixes severe problems and speeds the operating system up significantly.

Since the primary laptop I use in the evenings at home has been running like a dog since it has Vista installed, I downloaded the

450 MB stand-alone version of Vista SP1 and began the update. Being just under half a gigabyte, it took nearly an hour to download so I kicked it off before dinner and it had finished after we ate.

Most people should not have to bear this burden because as long as their automatic Windows Update is still active by default as it should be, all the prerequisite updates will have been done. That way Windows Update will only download the minimal SP1 package it needs which could be as little as 60 MB. I downloaded the full SP1 package so I can carry everything I need on my 8GB flash drive so I can update my client's Vista workstations in the following weeks.

After the download was completed, I started the SP1 upgrade process and sat back for another hour watching it load, update, and reboot at least three times. It may have rebooted even more than that since I got bored after a while and watched the Obama vs. Clinton battle on the news which was much more interesting than the long SP1 upgrade.

Finally it finish, and I imme-

diately noticed that my memory monitor gadget within the Vista Sidebar on the right side of my screen showed only 38 percent consumption. Since I have had Vista installed on this laptop with 2 GB of RAM, that monitor has always shown 50 percent of RAM consumed right after a reboot with nothing else running. This was a good start with such a significant reduction of memory waste.

The next thing I noticed was the quicker file copy times made possible by the Vista SP1 upgrade. This was important to me since all my business files are located on a workgroup server in my office and I just access them with my Vista laptop over our wireless network.

Before, I had long delays loading up spreadsheets and other data files, but it seem quite a bit faster after the SP1 upgrade.

Another big improvement was the faster boot up time along with the awakening speed after opening my closed. SP1 greatly reduced the wake up time it takes from both the sleep and hibernation modes.

Just these few improvements

of memory efficiency, file copy speedups, and faster wake up times made Vista much more attractive and well worth the effort of the time consuming SP1 installation.

There have also been numerous other improvements through the SP1 implementation. It addresses issues many common causes of crashes and hangs in Windows Vista while running the Calendar and Media Player that have been haunting users for the past year.

Other enhancements include Windows Vista's built-in file backup solution to handle EFS encrypted files, a StartUp Repair Tool that can fix missing OS files, and increased reliability by preventing data-loss while ejecting NTFS-formatted removable-media.

Power consumption and battery life efficiencies have been made by tweaking things like the processor sleep mode to kick in when the screen is not changing along with spinning down the hard drive in certain circumstances to save power.

SP1 also has a new compression algorithm for the RDP

(Remote Desktop Protocol) that helps reduce network bandwidth and improves that overall performance. This is a real help for me since I can constantly using Remote Desktop on my laptop to run Quickbooks at my desktop.

Overall this huge Windows Vista Service Pack I is well worth the time and effort it takes to download and apply it since the benefits are both numerous and substantial. Basically it makes Vista bearable now and is actually as good or even a little better than XP.

It's just a shame it took so long to get it done since the original Vista bugged so many people over the past year.

Bottom line: Vista may be revived from its death bed with the major Service Pack I since it fixes numerous problems, trims out the memory fat and speeds up the overall performance.

Next week's column: Flash drive recovery.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.