

# Forget the Vista nightmare, Windows 7 is here

After a week of having a laptop on Windows 7, I have come to really like it since the speed is definitely better, the startup and shutdown times are quicker, and the user interface has some neat enhancements.

Last week we covered the history of Windows versions and talked about the installation options, so this weekend let's review the improvements and new features of Windows 7.

The first thing I noticed was new network connection tool. After the installation completed I wanted to connect our wireless Internet so I clicked on the new wireless icon in the system tray on the lower right side of the screen that looked like a cell phone signal strength graph.

With just that single click the available wireless connections appeared allowing me to see and choose our main wireless zone name or SSID. It was so



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simple that it should help people new to managing their own wireless connections.

It may not sound like much but Microsoft finally improved its Paint program included with Windows 7. It now has some decent features and a Ribbons user interface similar to that in Office 2007.

Since Windows 7 has a truly 64-bit version of the OS it can really crank with some CPU intensive programs. Harper of Computer Helpers installed the latest Quickbooks 2010 on a new computer with Windows 7 and the application started up very quickly.

Quickbooks users will appreciate that one and I plan to upgrade my main workstation from XP to Windows 7 and Quickbooks from 2007 to 2010 just to get that performance enhancement.

Talking about performance

improvements, Microsoft finally did some work tweaking the recovery times of the sleep mode. Windows 7 takes less time to resume and reconnect to the wireless network than it did with Vista and XP. The Windows Search utility is snappier by displaying results faster than before.

Probably one of the best performance improvements is the faster USB device recognition and preparation time. This means I will wait less when I stick in my 16 GB flash drive into Windows 7 PCs. Since I do that numerous times a day this should cut down my idle time waiting for the Explorer windows to show the files in my USB toolbox.

Microsoft also tuned up the behind-the-scenes stuff like idle or unused processes. Any non-critical or third-party processes not in use are shutdown to save on memory consumption and help free up the CPU. This can make of big difference in performance especially when you have numerous applications or devices installed.

The Aero GUI (Graphic User Interface) has been improved in Windows 7 by adding some

neat features like Snap, Peek and Shake. The Snap capability makes it easier to quickly resize a window by dragging it to the edge and having it automatically scale to the upper or lower limits.

For instance if you click and drag a window to the right or left edge it auto-sizes the window to fit half the screen top to bottom. If you drag it to the top of the screen it will auto-size to fill the entire area.

The Peek feature allows you to see through your layered Windows by pointing your cursor to the right of the task bar. Shake gives you the power to quickly minimize all other windows by clicking at the top of one window and shaking it by moving your mouse.

Another nifty enhancement to the Windows 7 taskbar is the ability to easily pin up other program icons for quick reference and launching.

Jump Lists were added to Windows 7 and after playing around with them for a couple of days I do not know how I got along with out them. The Jump Lists are displayed when you right-click any program icon on the task bar. It then pops up a

list of recent documents or sites related to that program.

An example of this is to right-click the Internet Explorer icon on the task bar and you will see that last several URLs or sites you have been to lately. This came in handy when I would pick up the laptop and check on a news site or the status of my iPhone App on iTunes.

The new HomeGroup feature takes the work out of setting up file and printer sharing on a home network. This wizard takes you through a simple setup procedure which basically just provides you with a random password and then poof — you are sharing your local resources with other PCs on your home network.

The Parental Controls has been improved in Windows 7 enabling parents to set the times their kids can use the computer. Within the new Windows Media Player 12, the Parental Controls can enforce content filtering to keep little Johnny from listening to dirty songs.

Similarly the Family Safety section within the Windows Live suite can limit who your kids communicate with which can be very helpful.

Speaking of Windows Live,

it is the only native e-mail tool included with Windows 7. That part bugged me that they took out Windows Mail of Vista which replaced Outlook Express in XP. Since more people are migrating to Web mail rather than POP local e-mail services provided by their ISP, Microsoft decided to go all the way and dedicate its e-mail tool to a Web mail service.

Finally the one of the big enhancements Microsoft is proud of with Windows 7 is the ease of media sharing to other PCs. It even has Remote Media Streaming which enables users to share out their pictures, music and video to others over the Internet. I have not experimented with that one yet, but it sounds like a neat future article.

Bottom line: Windows 7 has some good improvements, so let's try to forget the Vista nightmare and have good dreams with version 7.

Next week's column: Google Street View.

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