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Get Ready For Windows 7

Deploy Windows Vista Now Or Test Apps And Hardware Against Windows Vista For Greater Compatibility With Windows 7

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Windows 7 is slated for release within the next nine months — and even sooner if the signs of an early release come to fruition. IT operations professionals need to start preparing for it now, and the best way to prepare for Windows 7 is by deploying Windows Vista. Short of that, begin testing your applications and hardware for compatibility against Windows Vista; It will pay off with greater compatibility with Windows 7. Why? Because Windows 7 is built on the same code base as Windows Vista, and the vast majority of applications that are compatible with Windows Vista will remain compatible with Windows 7. It's important to note that there will be some low-level application exceptions, such as client security, imaging, firewall, and networking, but the beta of Windows 7 shows significant promise, and most IT operations professionals are looking forward to its availability and eventual enterprise deployment.

WINDOWS 7 WILL HELP MINIMIZE ACCESS, SECURITY, AND SEARCH CHALLENGES

Forrester's Q3 2008 hardware survey found that 15% of North American and European enterprises plan on skipping Windows Vista entirely and moving straight to Windows 7 upon its release.¹ Additionally, 22% of these enterprises don't have plans for deploying Windows Vista at all, and another 6% simply don't know what their plans are. Anecdotally, there's a lot of enthusiasm among IT operations professionals for Windows 7, the next generation of the Windows client operating system.² However, it's important to set expectations that Windows 7 will not be the cure-all that enterprises are hoping for after Windows Vista. It's built on the same code base, so if your applications or hardware aren't compatible with Windows Vista, they're very likely not going to be compatible with Windows 7 either.

The top five Windows 7 features that IT operations professionals need to prepare for are:

- **DirectAccess, which promises to simplify connectivity for mobile users.** DirectAccess, which will rely on Windows Server 2008 R2 and IPv6-over-IPsec tunneling, will keep users connected to the corporate network, data, and resources whenever they're online — and without the need for a VPN. This feature promises to streamline the remote management of PCs for IT because users will be more constantly connected and available for security patches and software updates. DirectAccess also enables employees to be more productive while on the go because they won't have to manually connect through a VPN client or Web browser, saving them from repeated connectivity delays that are all too common today.



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- **BranchCache, which promises to improve branch access networking.** Enterprises are challenged to increase storage, security, networking, communications, and application services in branch offices while also trying to consolidate infrastructure and decrease costs.³ BranchCache will speed up branch-user access to remote files by caching a copy of files locally after the branch office workers access the files or applications. Also dependent on Windows Server 2008 R2, BranchCache will come in two forms: a local cache hosted on the server or on branch PCs running Windows 7 directly.
- **BitLocker To Go, which promises to secure the data on USB thumb drives.** Windows Vista delivered a number of security enhancements over Windows XP, including BitLocker Drive Encryption, User Account Control (UAC), and Windows Defender.⁴ With Windows 7, Microsoft has extended the functionality of BitLocker to USB storage devices. Now, IT administrators can enforce the encryption of USB devices to prevent users from copying corporate data to removable storage. In this case, access to data on removable storage can be restricted to authorized users through passphrases and through granular control of passphrase strength via Active Directory Domain Services.
- **AppLocker, which promises to deliver more granular control of user applications.** More than 65% of North American and European enterprises indicate that employees acting in unauthorized ways are an important threat they're facing.⁵ AppLocker will minimize this threat by offering IT managers the ability to specify via Group Policy exactly what is allowed to run on their systems. And it gives users the ability to run applications, installation programs, and scripts that administrators have explicitly granted permission to execute. This feature promises to lessen the threat of users running unauthorized applications, which are more prone to malware infections.
- **Federated search, which promises to simplify access to data across local and remote resources.** The massive amount of digital information that people create, store, and consume will only grow in the coming years. But people can't seem to find the information they need to get their work done, even if they have seen it before or saved it themselves.⁶ Windows 7 will improve the search capabilities in Windows Explorer by adding support for search across local and networked corporate data. Windows 7 will also introduce libraries, a single view into search results across different file types, folders, hard drives, and even PCs. Additionally, users and IT can create search connectors to internal and external sites and deploy them to PCs, which allows users to find data across document repositories, SharePoint, and Web-based applications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PLAN TO PHASE OUT WINDOWS XP WITH VISTA TODAY OR WINDOWS 7 IN 2011

More than two years after the release of Windows Vista, desktop operations managers at most enterprises have finally started their companywide deployments. Today, Windows Vista powers almost 10% of PCs within North American and European enterprises, but Windows XP remains the most dominant operating system, powering 71% of PCs. To better prepare your organization for Windows 7:

- **Windows XP shops should deploy Windows Vista or begin compatibility testing today.** Firms that couldn't justify the investment in Windows Vista should reconsider the risks of not deploying the operating system at all. Windows XP is slated for retirement by original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and system builders on June 30, 2009, and major independent software vendors are looking to phase out support for Windows XP later this year by adding support for Windows 7 early next year. Companies don't want to be caught running an operating system that is no longer supported by their vendors.⁷ And the best way to prepare for Windows 7 is by deploying Windows Vista. Short of that, begin testing your applications and hardware for compatibility against Windows Vista today, which will ease your eventual migration to Windows 7 in early 2011 — after the usual 12 to 18 months it traditionally takes enterprise IT departments to prepare to deploy any new operating system.
- **Windows Vista shops should continue their Windows Vista deployments.** Firms that have begun their Windows Vista deployments should continue their enterprisewide rollouts and only revisit whether to transition these deployments to Windows 7 after its release. These organizations will be in a much better position to move to Windows 7 sooner after its release than Windows XP shops because their applications and hardware will remain compatible. Windows XP shops, however, will be facing the same challenges of testing and remediating their applications for compatibility that Windows Vista shops have already overcome.

ENDNOTES

¹ Almost two years after the initial release of Windows Vista, desktop operations managers at mainstream enterprises are finally starting their companywide deployments. Today, Windows Vista is powering almost 10% of PCs within North American and European enterprises. While this figure might seem unimpressive to IT managers, when specifically asked about their Windows Vista deployment plans, almost one-third responded that they have already started their deployments, and another 26% cited plans to start this year or later. But IT decision-makers don't have an entirely rosy outlook for Windows Vista. Source: Forrester's Enterprise And SMB Hardware Survey, North America And Europe, Q3 2008, and see the January 30, 2009, "[Enterprises Warming To Windows Vista](#)" report.

² Windows Vista and its eventual successor, Windows 7, are top of mind for most desktop operations professionals these days, and this is reflected in the regular stream of inquiries Forrester receives from clients and nonclients alike. Between January and August 2008, Forrester's infrastructure and operations

team answered many inquiries, 54 of which were from IT decision-makers about desktop operating systems. Of those asking about desktop operating systems, 94% were considering deploying or had already begun their Windows Vista deployments. By the end of this year, Forrester anticipates that one-third of enterprises will begin deploying Windows Vista despite flirting with going straight to Windows 7 when it becomes available in early 2010. See the November 5, 2008, "[Inquiry Spotlight: Windows Vista, Q4 2008](#)" report.

- ³ To date, most firms have deployed numerous point products to solve these woes tactically. But recent technology advancements will streamline infrastructure requirements by consolidating numerous functions — like routing, wireless connectivity, security, application acceleration, IP telephony, IP address management, and remote monitoring — into fewer appliances. So, can firms deploy a “branch-office-in-a-box?” No. But depending on the branch profile, firms can intelligently collapse similar services — like security with routing and communications, as well as storage with application acceleration — to reduce the management burden and still offer full-service sites. See the October 4, 2006, "[The Evolving Branch Office: Intelligently Reducing Your Network Infrastructure Footprint](#)" report.
- ⁴ The biggest change for IT between Windows XP and Windows Vista is the account type users will be given. Within most companies that deployed Windows XP, users had to be given the administrator account. Basic tasks, like connecting to a wireless network or changing the time zone, required administrative privileges. Well, fear no more, IT: Microsoft refactored the operating system so that features that previously required administrator credentials are now accessible to standard users. Examples include changing the time zone, installing approved drivers, and delegating the installation of ActiveX controls. Now IT can standardize most users on the standard user account. Depending on the policies that IT sets in Active Directory, IT has more control over user privileges. Another security feature we hear IT directors salivate over is BitLocker Drive Encryption. Only available with Windows Vista Enterprise and Windows Vista Ultimate, BitLocker can be configured to encrypt the Windows Vista OS volume. Other security improvements like Internet Explorer 7 (IE7) for Windows Vista, IE7 Protected Mode, and Windows Defender have also been mentioned, although some IT managers attribute these improvements to the browser rather than the OS. See the August 9, 2007, "[Things To Consider When Preparing For Windows Vista](#)" report.
- ⁵ Security operations managers seem to be stuck in the past — in a time when viruses and worms dominated the security threatscape. Think back over 2007 — even 2006. Can you think of any widespread piece of malicious code that truly disrupted business? Instead, 2007 showed a constant parade of CNN headlines outing the latest data security breach. Why the focus on malicious code? Because the security operations group is handcuffed by problems they can tactically solve. Implementing personal firewalls and patch management have a proven business case — the threats are real, and the products work. Because the threat seems more remote, making a business case for encryption and information leak prevention is a much harder sell. See the April 4, 2008, "[Client Security Purchases Miss The Mark](#)" report.
- ⁶ Information workers waste a lot of time searching for information they already have. The daily torrent of email, calendar entries, tasks, notifications, and documents means that even the most organized people can struggle to find what they need. Our research suggests that many information workers have taken matters into their own hands, downloading consumer-grade desktop search tools at work to help them cope. Yet consumer desktop search exposes your enterprise to unnecessary risks, such as information

leaks. Information and knowledge management (I&KM) professionals must include desktop search in their broader information management strategies to enhance worker productivity and to mitigate the unintended consequences that consumer desktop search can cause. See the July 25, 2008, "[Why You Need Enterprise Strategy For Desktop Search](#)" report.

- ⁷ Microsoft is making accommodations through a flexible inventory program that will allow distributors to place their final orders by January 31, 2009, and take delivery against those orders through May 30, 2009. Source: Gregg Keizer, "Microsoft again extends Windows XP drop-dead date," *Computerworld*, December 23, 2008.