

## Vista Power Savings Helpful, but Behavior Changes Needed Too

Simon Mingay

Vista's power management improvements are useful but limited. Similar energy consumption cuts can be made with XP-based systems by changing users' behaviors — like shutting down PCs after hours.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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### Event

On 21 March 2007, Microsoft announced that an independent U.K. study completed by PC Pro Labs showed that, compared with XP, Vista's power management features could help a business with 200 PCs to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions by 45 tons a year and cut the annual energy bill for each PC by £46 (\$90).

### Analysis

Anything that improves PC power management will help energy-conscious businesses. Gartner estimates that PCs account for more than 0.5% of global carbon dioxide emissions and represent a significant proportion of office electricity bills. Vista improves power management performance, and provides more aggressive default settings and better management control over them. Also, Vista applications can't override power management events.

Though Vista's power management technology is helpful, a comprehensive energy-saving program requires addressing people and process issues as well. In fact, just about the same savings in electricity and carbon dioxide emissions can be made with XP-based systems by tackling people and process issues through user education and motivation, and by making the best use of existing XP power management features. Examples include:

- Shutting PCs down after hours
- Eliminating active screen savers
- Ensuring monitors switch to standby after 10 minutes of inactivity

Our research shows that most users respond very positively when education and behavioral changes are part of a broad program to save energy and cut carbon dioxide emissions. People and process changes are harder to make than technology changes, but go much deeper and will have impacts beyond any Windows upgrade. Businesses therefore shouldn't justify upgrading to Vista just because of improved power management. But Vista's features will help where users don't cooperate.

Software upgrades also have other potential environmental impacts. Software companies will increasingly be scrutinized by environmental groups if their practices force businesses to prematurely dispose of equipment. Some environmentalists believe Vista will cause businesses to dispose of serviceable computer-related equipment, thus creating unnecessary "e-waste." But suggesting Vista is bad because of potential e-waste is no better than saying its power management makes it "green." Sustainable IT management equations just aren't that simple.

There is huge room for improvement across the IT industry in reducing power consumption, from chip, software and data center design, through usage. Software companies should follow the lead of mobile handset designers by developing applications that have a much lower environmental footprint.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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Before embarking on an expensive Vista upgrade to achieve green benefits, businesses should spend a much smaller amount on a broad-based education and training program to help staff understand why saving energy is important to the business. The program should encourage staff

to use the power management features that are already available in XP, and to adopt a more energy-conscious set of behaviors for other IT and electricity-consuming devices, including printers, scanners, photocopiers and monitors — and, of course, lights.

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

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- "The IT Industry Is Part of the Climate Change and Sustainability Problem" — The IT industry and IT organizations must understand the changing sociopolitical views of climate change and take action to ensure that they're part of the solution, not the problem. **By Simon Mingay**
- "Cut Costs and Boost Environmental Benefits by Shutting Off PCs and Monitors" — Simply turning off PCs and associated equipment, and making more-intelligent use of power management features, will make a significant difference in IT-related power consumption, emissions and costs. **By Simon Mingay**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

This research is part of a set of related research pieces. See "Green IT: The New Industry Shock Wave" for an overview.

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