

Vista Service Pack 1 Marks a Milestone for Enterprises

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Microsoft has released the long-awaited Windows Vista Service Pack 1. While this technical update is key for Vista's functionality, it is even more important as a milestone for many organizations.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 4 February 2008, Microsoft released Windows Vista Service Pack 1 (SP1) to manufacturing after several months of testing. Microsoft plans to make SP1 available to volume licensing customers in early March.

Analysis

Windows Vista SP1 consists of a roll-up of fixes (which are already available through Windows Update), some less critical fixes, and minor changes to the way parts of the operating system (OS) operate. Bundling these fixes will reduce the time it takes to get a new Vista installation fully patched. On another front, Microsoft is using SP1 to bring parts of the OS into compliance with legal agreements worldwide and to change the way its anti-piracy program works. Based on the test versions of SP1, changes will be subtle for most users, but they will create a polished OS platform that is closer to the stability of Windows XP.

What is in the service pack is almost secondary to its value as a milestone. Many organizations use the arrival of the first service pack as a sign that the OS has reached maturity and is ready to be deployed throughout the enterprise. Compared with previous Windows releases, this is an artificial marker, since Windows Update continually refreshes the OS. Nevertheless, SP1 will prompt organizations to start real testing and persuade many third-party software providers to start delivering full support for the new platform. We expect that SP1 will help break the standoff between users, who are waiting for such full support, and third-party technology vendors, who are waiting for users to start adopting. Indeed, this perceived maturity could encourage adoption of Vista, as many organizations have delayed Vista deployments and are nine to 12 months behind where they'd predicted they would be a year before, with minimal deployments of 0.9% of desktops and 2.8% of notebooks, according to an October 2007 Gartner survey.

It's unusual for Microsoft to release code to manufacturing but not make it available for download for a full a month afterward. In the past, most large accounts could download a copy of a service pack for testing almost immediately after the release to manufacturing (RTM). Microsoft's explanation is that the delayed release date will allow some vendors to correct systems before users try to install SP1. For enterprises trying to complete a project in 2008, the lag time may imperil such endeavors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Microsoft customers working on Windows Vista deployment projects in 2008:

Move Vista testing programs to SP1 as soon as possible.

Pressure your Microsoft technical account manager or sales representative to give you immediate access to the SP1 gold release.

Microsoft customers that have already deployed Vista:

Ensure that you have a plan to deploy SP1 by the time security support for the Vista RTM version is eliminated in March 2010.

Microsoft customers that have not started Windows Vista deployments:

Recognize that SP1's release is a good time to start testing applications, but may not be a reason to accelerate deployment. However, for most organizations, we do not recommend skipping Windows Vista entirely.

RECOMMENDED READING

"Don't Skip Windows Vista Entirely" — Organizations should avoid the temptation to skip Windows Vista entirely. **By Michael Silver**

"Advice for Planning and Deploying Windows Vista" — Enterprises can use these guidelines to weigh costs and benefits of Vista and plan deployment. **By Michael Silver, David Mitchell Smith and Steven Kleynhans**

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