

Windows 7 Hype Should Not Alter Windows Vista Deployment Plans

Stephen Kleynhans, Michael A. Silver

Microsoft's Windows 7 will offer improved usability and functions over Windows Vista. But organizations should stick with Vista deployment plans, because most will not be ready to deploy Windows 7 until mid-2011 or later.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 28 October 2008, Microsoft offered the first details on the next version of Windows, "Windows 7," at its Professional Developers Conference. While Microsoft remains circumspect about its targets, we expect Windows 7 will ship in advance of the 2009 holiday season.

Windows 7 features will include:

- A streamlined user interface, which includes improvement in discoverability, personal files and media
- BitLocker To Go, which enables encryption on removable devices that enterprises can enforce via policy
- AppLocker group policies, allowing better control application installation and execution
- Improved diagnostics and PowerShell scripting tools
- BranchCache, which uses peer systems or local servers in a branch office to cache information to improve network performance
- Hard Links, delivering a fresh OS image without having to wipe and restore data

Analysis

There are two kinds of Windows releases — “plumbing” releases, which make major changes to Windows architecture, and “polishing” releases, which build on the plumbing release, improving usability and functionality. Windows Vista was a plumbing release; Windows 7 is shaping up to be a polishing release, just as Windows XP was a polishing release of Windows 2000. We believe that the name Windows “7” is more a marketing statement to distance the new release from the poorly received Vista than a marker of major architectural changes; it would be better characterized as version 6.x.

Many will see refinements in Windows 7 as a reason to skip Windows Vista. However, the many improvements in Windows 7 do not persuade us to change our advice on Vista deployment. The features target personalized experiences, improved access to information and services, and improvements in device handling, but will not significantly improve compatibility or testing over current Vista versions. Microsoft will likely ship Windows 7 in 3Q09, in time for holiday PC preloads, and organizations will need about a year to ensure application compatibility and independent software vendor (ISV) support for applications. Most organizations will not be ready to deploy Windows 7 until about 18 months after it ships — mid-2011 if it ships on time, and into 2012 if it ships late.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enterprises:

- Test applications on Vista and have a remediation plan, even if you plan to skip Vista. Applications that do not run on Vista will likely not run on Windows 7, so skipping Vista will not avoid the cost of remediating them.

- Consider bringing in Vista on new PCs. This move is the least expensive and lowest-risk alternative, as most organizations cannot effect an inexpensive forklift upgrade of an OS.
- If your organization plans to try to skip Vista, do not expect to bring in Windows 7 solely via PC attrition, because you will want to eliminate Windows XP by YE2012 to avoid waning application support for XP or problems related to April 2014, when Microsoft security support ends. Plan a forklift migration to Windows 7 around 2012.
- Focus on your OS deployment capabilities and target date to eliminate XP before ISV support wanes. Reduce risk all around, not just on specific features.

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Plot Your Microsoft Windows Client Strategy for XP, Vista and Beyond" — This collection of research highlights quantification methods that help enterprises navigate the host of options related to Microsoft upgrades. **By Michael Silver**
- "Understand the Risks of Skipping Windows Vista" — Enterprises that try to skip Windows Vista and wait for the next release are likely to have support issues and other problems. **By Michael Silver**

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

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Corporate Headquarters

56 Top Gallant Road
Stamford, CT 06902-7700
U.S.A.
+1 203 964 0096

European Headquarters

Tamesis
The Glanty
Egham
Surrey, TW20 9AW
UNITED KINGDOM
+44 1784 431611

Asia/Pacific Headquarters

Gartner Australasia Pty. Ltd.
Level 9, 141 Walker Street
North Sydney
New South Wales 2060
AUSTRALIA
+61 2 9459 4600

Japan Headquarters

Gartner Japan Ltd.
Aobadai Hills, 6F
7-7, Aobadai, 4-chome
Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0042
JAPAN
+81 3 3481 3670

Latin America Headquarters

Gartner do Brazil
Av. das Nações Unidas, 12551
9º andar—World Trade Center
04578-903—São Paulo SP
BRAZIL
+55 11 3443 1509