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Microsoft Windows Vista Home Premium - PC

Is it time to finally replace Windows XP?

by Stephen Patrick published on 30 January 2007

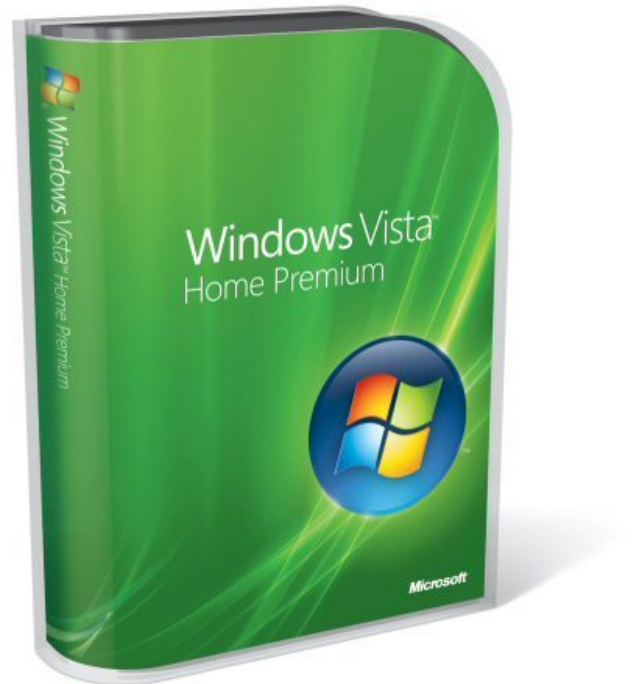
The best part of 6 years and any number of false release dates can't avoid the fact that the release of Windows Vista isn't a highly anticipated event. After all, anyone who buys a computer in any form from this day on is 99% guaranteed to find Vista pre-installed. So are there any big surprises or is it simply XP with a nice new gloss of paint?

We've been playing with the final code for the last 6 weeks and while at first the new OS takes a little time to get to grips with, it's a vast improvement over XP. The new interface is similar to what we are used to but the use of the Aero engine, which allows for things to pop-up in 3D (if your graphics card is powerful enough) looks great but it is resource heavy.

One of the big criticisms is that it's the closest thing you can get to the Mac OS without it having an Apple logo. Sure, there are features in Vista that seem to have been lifted - the whole interface for one - but to be fair, the similarities are cosmetic as Windows works in its own way. Take for instance the search feature. It's been on the Mac for ages but it's not as quick or as intuitive as the new search bar in Vista. It's a neat feature and once you start using it, you'll wonder why it hasn't been there all along.

You can't gauge simply by looking at the new OS, is how effectively it stops attacks and online threats. Microsoft is claiming that from install, Vista is far more secure than Windows XP ever was. For instance, the Windows Firewall now works in both directions, so will no longer allow your machine to send out under authorised messages, as well as continuing to stop inbound attacks.

One of the more controversial inclusions is



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Windows Defender, which comes as standard, as does a beefed-up version of Security Centre, which now comes with malware protection. You'll still need to install your own anti-virus software but at least most of the work is now handled inside Windows, which is better for first-time or cautious users.

If you have children then the built-in Parental Controls will allow you to set up rules for who can access your PC. With four types of restriction on offer, ranging from the time of day they can gain access, to web filtering, which limits the sites, they can visit. Then there are 11 types of filter included; you can block websites for any level of control you see fit. You can also block downloads, which will save on potential virus threats suddenly popping up on your machine. If you don't want your children using specific programs, you can also restrict access to these too.

If you've ever had to set up a network, whether fixed or Wi-Fi, you'll know how cumbersome Windows XP can be. Vista is a vast improvement and takes most of the strain out of gaining, and just as importantly, maintaining a connection. What's more, you can set up different profiles, such as Work or Home with different rules to apply to each location. You'll find all the relevant controls in the Network and Sharing Centre. You'll even find controls for setting up and synchronising your mobile devices, so smartphone users can also feel the benefit of Vista.

VERDICT

For most of us, it isn't a case of whether you like Vista or not, it's simply an OS you'll have to get used to.

However, the fact that it actually works pretty much the way it was intended makes migrating to it a far more happier event.

We'll miss Windows XP, but Vista is a great OS and we're sure you'll agree.

At a glance

What is it?

Your new OS

Good

Quick, easy to use, looks and works great

Bad

Too many confusing versions, graphics heavy

Verdict

It may not be cool to like Microsoft but this version of the new OS is simple stunning: easy to use, impressive and (so far) safe to use, which makes upgrading to it a far more enjoyable thought

Price £220

Our score

8/10

Your score

8/10