

My Vista Experience



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Like all Microsoft Windows based computer technicians and support staff all over the world, I myself have taken the plunge and upgraded to the new Microsoft Vista operating system. It's not that I *need* it at the moment, but simply I must start *learning* all about it to begin to understand how to repair, service and support it when the time comes. Since most new computers sold from now on will come pre-installed with Microsoft Vista, I must get ready to support the next generation of computer users using the next generation of Microsoft Windows. For those of you considering or currently attempting to upgrade your current version of Windows XP to Microsoft Vista, be aware of what may lie ahead. Most wise users wait awhile until the dust settles.

This is an account of how *my* personal upgrade experience unfolded. By no means is it a dig at Microsoft nor at any hardware or software supplier. Operating system conversions are a nightmare for a lot of users and technicians and it has been that way for a long time. Those who remember the shock of moving from DOS 6.22 & Windows 3.11 to Windows 95 will know exactly what I mean. (I started around the Commodore 64 days in the 80's)

To begin with, Microsoft Windows Vista comes in many versions and I will leave it to you to do your own homework to study the differences in detail. The link below will take you to the Microsoft Vista Homepage and you can research the product from there.

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/default.aspx>

Most users in my current customer base will be eventually using the 'Home Basic' or 'Home Premium' versions of Vista. It is *highly advised* to check all the versions to ensure the features you need are supported in your choice when the time comes.

Whether you take the plunge now, or in a year or two or three, it will eventually happen as Microsoft Windows XP reaches its 9th year in operation by 2010. By then it will be lacking a lot of support for the upcoming new technologies, mostly driven by the changes of the internet and then followed by new hardware specifically designed for 'Vista' only.



For those who are interested, Microsoft Windows XP was born in 2001, making it the longest running version of Microsoft Windows in history!

Some will say 'why should I change?' and the answer has always been the same since 1990 ...

Things change, and most people don't use the older previous versions of Windows anymore because they no longer support the newer technologies that arrived as time went by.

In the future, new things will begin to appear that Windows XP will not be able to support.

The new 'Microsoft Windows Vista' operating system is the next stage in the evolution of IBM compatible computing

I have elected to purchase and install the Microsoft Vista 'Ultimate' full version so I can study and research all the available Vista components. As a side note, I have also upgraded to the new Office 2007 Professional version and I must say I love it! Word 2007 is 'heaven sent' as I do a lot of writing and it is the best version of Word so far.

Okay, and now for the show to begin!

To begin with, I went to the Microsoft Vista 'Upgrade Advisor' (which can be found via the main website link above) to check out my computer hardware for compatibility. By the way, anyone who attempts to upgrade to Windows Vista without first checking the 'Upgrade Advisor' will be wasting a lot of time. *It is critical to identify as many of the problems and incompatibilities with your current hardware and take measures to resolve them PRIOR to installing Windows Vista.* You have been warned! Computers more than 2 years old will have issues.

My first shock was that my much loved ATI Radeon X850 XT Platinum Edition 256MB PCIExpress video card was not going to handle the 'Aero Glass' premium requirements for Microsoft Vista as it lacked certain hardware requirements. (Shader model 2.0 for techs) This card cost me over \$500 not 8 months ago, and it was a very high performance video card! *sob*

Anyway after purchasing and installing a new Nvidia GeForce 7900 GS 512MB PCI Express Video Card with the Vista 'Aero Glass' technical requirements, (\$350) I was ready to continue.

The rest of my computer system was shown to be mostly compliant with warnings about my SATA controller and sound system. (for techs , ABit AL8, 2GB 667 DDR2 Corsair RAM, Intel Pentium 4 Dual Core 3.0 GHz CPU, GF7900GS 512MB PCIExpress, 500GB Samsung & 350GB Western Digital SATAII Drives, Sony DVD-RW , Antec NEO 480 PSU)

Now onto the preflight check schedule (check your seatbelts)

The DATA Backup routine:

Okay the data backup routine. For me I do it for a living prior to any serious computer service anyway so it's just time consuming. I already keep most of my data on a secondary 350GB hard drive in my computer and a 300GB external USB drive which automatically backs up my everyday business data. ***So it was just a matter of checking that my data backup program was Vista compatible.*** Since I am now using the new 'Microsoft OneCare' program to run my Automatic backup system, I am safe. But be aware of the fact that if you use a backup system that compresses or encrypts your data in a non standard format, you will not get access to it if the program you used to create your backup is not Microsoft Vista compatible! Don't paint yourself into a corner. Backup your data manually if you are not sure. If you do not know where your Outlook Express, Office Outlook or even your favorites folder data physically resides in your computer ~ stop what you're doing and call for help. Seriously, I have seen someone attempting to back up their Email system by copying the desktop shortcut icon of Outlook Express onto a floppy disk. Yes that happened.

As a sub note, the idea that you won't have to backup your data off the computer because you are only doing a Microsoft Vista 'upgrade' on top of your original Windows XP is insane for 4 primary and 4 million other reasons. Whatever you do, be very cautious attempting an upgrade over the top of your current Windows XP installation.

Point 1. Anything could go wrong. Computers are weird like that.

- Point 2. Upgrading a new operating system over the top of another is for crazy people. The permutations of things going wrong because of previously installed incompatible programs on the original drive will bring the stability rating of the new system (if it works at all) to a chance of zero out of 4 million. Good luck to you, don't call me to fix it.
- Point 3. Clean operating installations on a blank hard drive allows the new system to format the hard drive to check for any hidden problems that it may miss if installed over an active already in use partition.
- Point 4. Deeply hidden virus and spyware infections plus corruptions in the registry will cause nothing but trouble.

Okay, data backup taken care of

In my case I purchased a new Samsung 500GB Hard Drive for the dedicated Microsoft Vista installation, keeping the untouched original Windows XP hard drive out of the machine in case I had to go back to it. (A very wise move it turned out to be) You would be very surprised at how many little things you forget to check and note before you replace your operating system! Oh, and for the technically curious, I don't support dual boot operating systems so that was never an option throughout this entire ritual. Dual boot vs Single boot systems are a 'Holden vs Ford' tech argument. My personal reason is that O/S systems and DATA recovery can be a nightmare on a dual boot system failure. Enough said, no dual boot happening here.

The Primary Installation:

I don't want to get into too many technical details but of course you have to check and adjust your BIOS to boot from your DVD device. (it's a given that Vista needs a DVD device as it only comes on DVD media) So in with the Vista Ultimate DVD and watch the Vista installation unfold

I was very surprised to see how quick the preliminary installation went. A Windows XP installation on a new 500GB hard drive takes around an hour or more. I don't know how Vista did it yet but I saw no visual feedback on the actual formatting of the new 500GB Hard Drive. It was obviously doing some sort of background formatting routine but I have yet to discover the details on this. I timed the completion of the complete preliminary installation to about 30 Minutes which is a lot less time than it usually takes to even format a new 500GB hard drive, let alone install an operating system on it. This is very impressive. It will save me a lot of time servicing Vista in the future!

Finally Microsoft Windows Vista is born. At this stage it looks great, like a beautiful actress in a red dinner dress in the moonlight. Trouble is, she is frowning as she has a broken heel on her shoe

Vista has started up fine and is informing me of all the hardware I have currently connected that it doesn't like. (broken heels) The following pages detail the problems and solutions to get my unsupported hardware issues resolved.

This stage of the game will be irrelevant for a new computer pre-installed with Microsoft Vista as the supplier would have ensured compatibility. Look for the new 'Vista' compatible labels on new computers, accessories and programs in the future.

The following problems are expected as my computer was constructed by me prior to the release of Vista

Incompatible Hardware encountered

Main board : ABit AL8 SATA & sound controller chipsets - *RESOLVED*

I had of course researched this and simply downloaded the Vista updated drivers for both these devices. No problem here.

Printer : Canon iP3000 (partial problem only) - *RESOLVED*

The Canon iP3000 printer is directly supported by Vista via a 'built in' driver and fully supports all the original features in the original Canon driver. However, the supportive canon printing programs are not compatible. Most of these extra features were irrelevant to me but I do a lot of direct printing to CDs & DVDs and the Canon CD printing program was not compatible.

I eventually found an alternative Vista compatible version of this program on a German website having no luck on any local canon support website. Contact me if you need help with this also.

By the way, my 8 year old Hewlett Packard Laserjet 6P 'dinosaur' LPT laser printer automatically configured with full Vista supportive drivers etc. She's a good old girl!

Scanner : Canon LiDE60 - *RESOLVED*

The original Canon LiDE60 USB Scanner XP driver and supportive programs are not Vista compatible. A quick check on the canon website reveals a new Vista driver ready to download and install. I don't use any of the other programs that came on the original CD so this is not an issue for me. If you do use the extra programs like the OCR options etc, they may be another issue.

WEBCAM : Logitech Quickcam Home - *CANNOT BE USED, INCOMPATIBLE*

This was a surprise as Windows XP natively supported this Webcam without any drivers at all. This is why I had hung on to it for all these years. I checked the Logitech website for updated drivers and after a few minutes discovered that I could dream about any support for my old webcam. It was over 6 years old so I was not really bothered about it. Solution = buy a new Vista compatible webcam.

UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) : Powerware 5110 - *NOT YET RESOLVED*

The UPS of course still works (as it has no idea if it's powering a toaster or a computer). It is the monitoring software connected to the USB Port that was not compatible. I was warned of this via the Vista 'upgrade advisor' website link, so I was not surprised. Although the side effect was a bit of a shock as I had forgotten (stupidly) to disconnect the USB cable from the computer to the UPS. During the original hardware scan of the Vista installation the power cut out instantaneously when it tested the connection to the UPS. After my heart slowed back down to breathing pace, I disconnected the USB cable to the UPS and restarted the Vista installation. To my surprise it reported the failure and simply continued on its way from the last point of the installation. This problem is not yet resolved as I have not found a newer version of the software yet. The supplier is quite good so I'm happy to wait for them to come up with answer soon.

Microsoft Keyboard and Mouse: - *RESOLVED*

This was very minor as my Microsoft Natural Multimedia Keyboard & Wireless Optical mouse still operated of course but my old support programs for monitoring battery levels and programming the keys etc required new vista compatible versions. Easily downloaded and installed from the Microsoft Website.

Conclusion:

No real problems here. A new video card was (secretly) expected. A new Webcam is no big deal. Motherboard drivers, Canon printer & scanner, Keyboard & mouse issues are easily resolved by any skilled computer user with access to the web.

Incompatible Software encountered:

Now this is where the can of worms starts opening. Most users will find many ways around their hardware incompatibilities. That's life in the world of computers and par for the course in the world of new operating systems. But watch what happens when you have a problem with software programs. I strongly suggest you **check all your critical programs for compatibility prior to even thinking Vista**, as if they don't work you will have to consider the consequences which can be very costly and time consuming. In my case I was expecting these problems. I wasn't expecting the level of solutions I needed but this situation serves as a good example of what can happen and you simply have to be prepared for it.

Also be wary that it will be pointless complaining to the person who sold or advised you to install Microsoft Windows Vista or buy a new computer with it preinstalled, as they could not possibly have fore knowledge of the 100s of thousands of programs out there that may or may not be compatible. You are on your own and that is a very critical factor. Most 'seasoned' users wait around sometime to listen and read about the problems others have encountered before they take the plunge themselves.

That being said, let's see how I fared ... *Let the incompatibility games begin !*

Coolpage Webpage Editor: - **CANNOT BE USED, CURRENT VERSION INCOMPATIBLE**

'Coolpage' is what I use to create, edit & publish my web pages to my website. It is very intricately setup in my original Windows XP system and is a core program to the running of my business. Also, it is totally incompatible to Microsoft Vista. Not only does it generate errors when it tries to close (I can live with that) but its built in FTP web publishing system does not operate at all. Oh dear

I spent 8 hours alone on this problem with no simple positive result but learnt a lot in the process. After trying to utilize another Microsoft Vista compatible FTP program to at least upload the edited data within the Coolpage created folders, I discovered that Microsoft Vista no longer uses the Windows XP {C:\documents and settings\ user account} filing system! And guess what, all my website datafiles are internally linked with the originally created paths to just such a place. 'Ah ha' I say, I will then just create a 'documents and settings' folder in the new Vista hard drive root directory and simply manually recreate the database. Oh no! Try it yourself to see what happens. It cannot be done. Vista produces a 'guess again' type tech warning informing me that anything I create in the root directory will simply be moved into the new Vista {C:\users} filing system. I spent the next hour seeing how long it would take to convert every internal weblink within my webpage to the new system and gave up. I calculate it will take me 4 months.

For the tech types, Coolpage stores all the local files of my entire website in a special *.cpg file format and only converts them to html when they are externally published to my website host. So I can't even switch to a new website editing program without entirely rebuilding the website from scratch. This is my fault for not seeing into the future on this one. I remember thinking that Coolpage was too good to be true! It was just too easy to use, and now I know why. But as you see further down the page I still chose to stick with it even though it required a rather severe solution.

Likno Web Button Maker: CANNOT BE USED, CURRENT VERSION INCOMPATIBLE

Now this is what forced the next decision. Since I use the 'Likno Web button maker' program to make and edit the buttons on my website, again I am stuffed. It too failed to operate at all simply throwing up serious errors and failures.

Emergency solution required!

Yes, although learning the new Vista system is important I do have a business to run and I must have access to edit and update my website. So the next 8 hours were taken up constructing, installing and preparing a second Windows XP based computer system installed with all my website data and all the original programs required to edit and maintain it. I now have to switch between the 2 computer systems when I am working on my website. They are both linked to the same monitor which luckily has dual inputs so it's just a little less desktop space and a bit of a pain juggling keyboards and mouses. Or is it mice?

The above was a perfect example of what might happen to anyone currently using software that simply won't work with Vista. Both the Coolpage & Likno programs are fully paid for and registered programs that I love to use. So I am sticking to them. Perhaps in the near future they will provide upgraded 'Vista' compatible versions.

MYOB Accounting: First Accounts & Version 13 and earlier, INCOMPATIBLE !!!

Well now it's hit the fan! I run my entire book keeping system on MYOB Version 13. This will not complete its installation and a quick phone call to MYOB support staff verifies that earlier versions of this accounting system are not compatible with Microsoft Vista. So after identifying me as a registered user of MYOB First Accounts I completed the steps to upgrade to MYOB Accounting version 16. This cost me around \$250, but if you are not a registered previous version user it can cost up to \$400 or more depending on the Version your business was using.

So be warned, *MYOB Versions First Accounts through to Version 13 and possibly higher up to Version 15, are not Microsoft Vista compatible* and you will have to purchase a newer version.

Okay done & done. I have now paid for and downloaded the new version of MYOB and have converted my company data files to the new version. Business Accounting system back on the track although it's missing another \$250 from the master account.

Nero CD-DVD Burning software Series 6.0 or earlier: INCOMPATIBLE

This is only a minor setback to me as Microsoft Vista 'Ultimate' has full internal CD & DVD Burning support at all levels up to DVD movie making even at high definition. This will be an important issue to check with other versions of Vista as some do not have all the DVD burning features as others. Although I am going to miss the NERO 6.0 interface and operations, Vista Ultimate's built in DVD Authoring and Productions systems will do just fine for my needs.

PDFCreator: CANNOT BE USED, CURRENT VERSION INCOMPATIBLE

Pity, this was an excellent and free program. I used it every day to convert Word Documents to PDFs prior to publishing on the web or emailing etc. A quick check in my new Office Word 2007 hoping for a built in converter came up empty, but by checking the online add-on features provided to registered Microsoft Office 2007 users revealed a solution! Yes, you can install a Microsoft provided PDF converter directly into the new version of Office 2007. Woo woo a solution! This of course is not a solution to Vista users that don't upgrade to Office 2007.

Final Conclusion:

Well, after 4 days of working out all my incompatibly issues, I sat back, had a beer and installed my favorite game 'World of War Craft'. It all worked like a charm and even looks and runs better with the upgraded video card. It just goes to show you that some software publishers are either luckier or smarter than others.

After having a bit of fun, I spent the next 6 hours examining the various new features and general operations of the new **Microsoft Vista Experience**. I must say that all the advertising hype is right after all. When you have dealt with your personal conversion issues to Vista, you too will understand why.

There is a very WOW factor at the end of the road !

(World of Warcraft pun not intended!)

'It is the very best version of Microsoft Windows' I have ever seen or used so far.

There is no comparison or any doubt in my mind about it.

The question is, *what are you going to go through to upgrade to it ?*

There is no doubt about the expense involved here for a computer more than a year old and running any 'Vista' incompatible software critical to a user or a business. With luck you may not come across the software problems I had.

My upgrade experience cost me 4 days of time and around \$1000 of product upgrade costs. But to put that into perspective, I paid a lot more than that when I upgraded from Windows 98 to Windows XP ~ 5 years ago.

Obviously any honest supplier or technician would have quickly discovered the amount of incompatibility issues in *my own scenario* and would have kindly suggested that I stick to Windows XP on this particular computer as it was certainly capable of continuing to do all the things it was set up to do for a few more years.

The eventual transition to the new 'Microsoft Windows Vista' operating system is going to be different for everyone.

My advice for the rest of you, who are thinking about making the change now, be sure you get a professional 'Vista' compatibility assessment of your current computer, accessories and all of your current critical programs that you cannot live without **BEFORE** you take the plunge.

Even those purchasing new computers pre-installed with the new Microsoft Windows Vista operating system, should check on the compatibility of all their currently owned programs and accessories.

In reality, only technicians, enthusiasts and computer support companies will have the need or want to migrate to the new 'Vista' system at this early point of its release. As the past has shown, as time goes by, many incompatibility issues will become resolved. By the end of this year and from then on, the change from Windows XP will become a smoother transition for the rest of the world.

A new dawn of computing has begun ...