

UnderstandIT

From **MAY DAY CONSULTING LIMITED** in association with **Facilitators International LLP**

A publication designed to inform and enable businesses to understand the implications, costs and advantages of using Information and Communications Technology. Distributed through Chambers of Commerce.

VISTA ARRIVES – THE WOW IS NOW! – OR IS IT?

Amid the anticipated hype and worldwide media coverage, the long-awaited new version of the Windows operating system made its debut on January 30th. To many it has been the major event of the year; to others it is just more Microsoft hype and yet another step in their domination of the operating system market.

The truth, we believe is somewhere in between. The new version of Windows has certainly been a long time in its incubation – it is now 5 years since Windows XP arrived. This is the longest that the world has had to wait for the next version of the ubiquitous operating system.

The delay has been largely due to Microsoft's aim of producing an operating system that is more intuitive, visually stunning and most importantly, secure. The history of Windows and other Microsoft programs has been littered with the need to publish an increasing number of software "patches" to plug holes that skilled hackers have relentlessly tried (and most often succeeded) to exploit in their attempts to gain access to, and enlist computer systems into their network of "drones". They then use these systems to churn out spam email. Alternatively they simply run a small program designed to capture keystrokes entered by a hapless user, so that they can then use that information to plunder the user's bank or credit card account.

Microsoft claims that Vista is the most secure operating system ever produced, and that it contains many new technological innovations that will provide a platform for supporting much more secure computing in the future. In fact, they have actually listened to users' complaints with regard to leaving fundamental security options switched off by default in Windows XP. These features are now turned on by default in Vista.

Only time will tell just how secure the new operating system is, but judging from history, it will not be long before Microsoft will, once again, be issuing patches to plug loopholes.

The new operating system is available in a bewildering number of different versions – each aimed at a specific market segment. We feel that there are just too many options, which makes it difficult to decide which edition is best for our needs. You might wish to have a combination of facilities from two different versions to fully meet your needs.

However, Microsoft have presumably carried out extensive marketing research to determine that this is the best approach to selling an operating system. However, the following is what Microsoft say (taken from their own web site) about each edition and what they provide.

Home Basic (Typical price: £74 Upgrade, £149 full copy)

".. ideal for homes with basic computing needs like e-mail, browsing the Internet, and viewing photos. Easy to set up and maintain, it enables you to quickly find what you're looking for on your PC and the Internet, while providing a more secure environment to help protect you from an unpredictable world."

Home Premium (Typical price: £119 Upgrade, £179 full copy)

"Windows Vista Home Premium is the preferred edition for home desktop and mobile PCs. It provides a breakthrough design that brings your world into sharper focus while delivering the productivity, entertainment, and security you need from your PC at home or on the go."

Business (Typical price: £142 Upgrade, £211 Full copy)

"Windows Vista Business is the first edition of Windows designed specifically to meet the needs of small businesses. You'll spend less time on technology support-related issues—so you can spend more time making your business successful. Windows Vista Business is the definitive choice for your business today *and* tomorrow."

Ultimate (Typical price: £199 Upgrade, £299 full copy)

"Windows Vista Ultimate is the choice for those who want to have it all. Easily shift between the worlds of productivity and play with the most complete edition of Windows Vista. Ultimate provides the power, security, and mobility features needed for work, and all the entertainment features that you want for fun."

Enterprise (Need to discuss with supplier/Microsoft)

"Designed to significantly lower IT costs and risks, Windows Vista Enterprise meets the needs of large, global organizations with complex IT infrastructures."

NB: Prices shown are indicative only.

There are undoubtedly many new features built into Vista that previous versions of Windows did not have, or did not do very well. These include an improved data encryption facility and a back-up and restore feature. However, these features are not all fully implemented in all versions.

You can find a more detailed explanation of the features here:

http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windows_vista/editions/default.msp

It is true to say that there is much cynicism in the IT industry on the benefits of upgrading from older versions of Windows. Certainly if you are still using Windows '95, '98 or ME, then there will be considerable benefits in terms of functionality, security and stability. However, for those using Windows 2000 or XP, then it is not such a clear decision. This is particularly true for the business community, especially larger organisations where the number of computers involved in any major upgrade such as this, makes it an expensive exercise in terms of cost and manpower. However, this has always been a major headache for IT managers or decision makers – when to upgrade and how much will it cost in real terms?

Many older computer systems may not be able to run Windows Vista and this may add to the potential cost, and inhibit many from upgrading. The minimum requirement is for a 1Ghz processor speed, 1 Gb memory and 20Gb hard disk, plus a good graphics card with at least 128Mb of dedicated graphics memory.

As with all major operating system upgrades, the decisions are not always easy to make – cost vs efficiency and security improvements. If you require assistance in coming to the correct decision for your business, then please call Alan Finch on 01224 697457.

SATNAV SCAM

As you will know, Satellite Navigation (SatNav) devices have, in the past year, become the device of the moment. They were one of the single largest selling items this past Xmas!

One of our clients related a recently uncovered scam to us and we thought it would be useful to pass on to Understand IT readers.

The scam involved a bogus car parking attendant at a large hotel, who operated when the regular parking valet was away at lunch. The parking valet would take charge of the car from the unsuspecting owner on arrival (usually an expensive model). After determining how long the owner would be away, he would proceed to drive the car to the owner's home. Using the owner's keys – helpfully including the house keys, the bogus attendant would then burgle the house and remove any valuables around.

How? By using the SatNav device safely stored in the car's glove compartment.

As anyone with one of these devices knows, you are likely to set your “home” destination prior to setting off on your journey. This helpfully allows any thief to know exactly where you live! Beware!

NEW RULES TO AID BROADBAND SWITCHING

Many Internet broadband users have been finding it very difficult to switch from one provider of broadband service to another. New rules, prepared by OFCOM come into force on February 14th 2007 that will make it easier to switch from one supplier to another.

There has been increasing competition in the broadband supply market over the past couple of years and this has resulted in significant reductions in the monthly cost of broadband. As a consequence, an increasing number of users are attempting to change provider so that they can take advantage of reduced costs.

However, many broadband providers have perhaps deliberately put obstacles in the way of users making the change. Many users have complained to OFCOM about various delaying tactics, which has resulted in these rules being introduced.

The most common problem relates to the release of the Migration Authorisation Codes (MAC) – these are 17-18 digit codes that are used by the industry to identify a user's connection device on the Internet. The code is required by the new provider, to allow them to connect the device to the network. Some providers have been dragging their feet in providing these codes to departing users, thereby delaying the migration to the new provider.

In fact, prior to this ruling, not all providers used the MAC code system, which also led to delays in clearing a departing user for connection to a competitor. Sometimes delays even occurred because there were financial disagreements between different suppliers, and the consumer was made to suffer!

From February 14th, all broadband providers must use the MAC system, and supply the appropriate MAC code to the departing user within 5 days of a request. They are also barred from making a charge for providing this code or for making the switch itself.

Although OFCOM cannot investigate or deal with individual cases, it is encouraging consumers to report difficulties in switching broadband providers post February 14th. It will monitor complaints and take any action that it can to bring errant providers to book. The penalty for this could be up to 10% of a provider's turnover!

We wish to acknowledge with thanks that some of the material contained within this publication has been sourced from Computer Weekly, PC Pro, BBC and other reputable sources..

May Day Consulting Limited and your Chamber of Commerce have endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication, but do not accept liability for any inaccuracy or omission contained within it.

Information on other Business and IT services can be found on our web site at: <http://www.maydayconsulting.co.uk> or by calling Alan Finch on 07968 262079.

May Day Consulting Ltd

.....stress free IT

9 Benbecula Road
ABERDEEN AB16 1FT
Tel: (01224) 697457

E-mail: info@maydayconsulting.co.uk
Internet: <http://www.maydayconsulting.co.uk>