

UnderstandIT

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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.

WINDOWS VISTA SERVICE PACK 1

For those of you who have taken the bold step of upgrading to Windows Vista, or perhaps purchased a new computer with one of the many versions of Vista pre-installed, then you may be interested to know that Microsoft have at last released the first Service Pack (SP1) for Vista.

Microsoft has been working on the new Service Pack for many months. The Service Pack is just a collection of modifications to the operating system that have been developed following reported “bugs” and other failings in the original release that have been reported by users.

Microsoft claims that SP1 will not only correct some failings, but improve security (we thought Vista was being touted as the most secure operation system ever produced, when it was originally released!). It also claims that it will improve performance.

If you are a Vista user, then you have a couple of options – to wait until Windows Update automatically offers and downloads the update for you (assuming that you have the auto-update feature in Vista switched on). This is scheduled to begin in mid April.

Alternatively, you can go to the Microsoft web site now and manually download SP1 yourself. However, there are downsides to the latter option – firstly, the reported download size is a whopping 434Mb, whereas the automatic update download is only 65Mb (we do not understand why there is such a major size difference).

The second problem maybe that whereas the auto-download version will first check any compatibility issues (with hardware or software drivers that you might have installed on your particular system), and update them prior to downloading SP1, the manual download version will not.

You can read more about known problems with Vista SP1 here:

<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/935796>

Microsoft advice on what to do before installing SP1 here:

<http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/windowsvista/bb968859.aspx>

Microsoft Windows Vista blog can be found here:

<http://windowsvistablog.com/blogs/windowsvista/archive/2008/03/18/windows-vista-sp1-released-to-windows-update.aspx>

ON-LINE STORAGE – MORE OPTIONS BECOMING AVAILABLE

There have been a growing number of services available for some time that offer “online” storage as a way of keeping copies of your important computer files safe and accessible on an Internet server.

The concept is of course quite sound – the ability to store information in a secure (we hope) environment, that is accessible anywhere, providing you have access to the Internet and can optionally be shared with others. The increased availability and performance of broadband has obviously made such services much more viable.

The various commercial services currently available all tend to have different business models and objectives – some are free, some are free but have intrusive advertising, others charge for storage. In terms of functionality, some just offer online storage, whereas others stress the ability to share files and folders with colleague and others.

The development of these services has been ongoing behind the scenes for 2-3 years now, but none have yet really matured, and even the big players like Google and Microsoft have been slow in talking about or even releasing services.

Google for example has been hesitant in talking about, but are known to be working on, their “GDRIVE” service. The reason for hesitancy is perhaps their parallel development of a suite of online applications a la Microsoft Office – Google Docs, which includes word processor, spreadsheet and presentation programs that are online and server based. This service obviously uses online storage as part of the offering. For more information, go to:

<http://www.google.com/google-d-s/intl/en/tour1.html>

Microsoft on the other hand recently quietly launched their Skydrive service as part of their Windows Live set of products. If you have a Windows Live account, you can sign up and immediately have 5Gb of free online storage available to you.

Files are also secure under your Windows Live User ID and password protection. However, you can only upload files 5 at a time, and although you can create folders, which can be “nested” to create hierarchies of files, once uploaded, they cannot be moved from folder to folder, which is very inflexible. Each file size is also limited to 50Mb, so storing large video files or other types of large file is obviously not possible.

Another service that is worth looking at is provided by JungleDisk (<http://www.jungledisk.com>). This chargeable service uses a Windows Explorer type interface to move and save files onto online storage that is provided by Amazon. It can also be used to automate back up of your critical files onto their online storage. However, a visit to their support forum indicates that it may not be as reliable as the company claims. Let the buyer beware!

A more recent announcement is from a US start up company (emanating from Massachusetts Institute of Technology – MIT) is DROPBOX. This application has not yet been launched publicly, but the advance information makes it a very interesting option, depending on what price (if any) is attached to it.

Dropbox is an application that is built into your desktop but is associated with an online account providing an unannounced amount of online storage. The interesting feature is that it is not only has a totally graphical interface and is therefore very intuitive, it allows files to be synchronised across a number of PC systems automatically (provided of course they are connected to the Internet).

This means that files can be dropped from local storage on your PC to the Dropbox folder on your desktop and those files are immediately uploaded and synchronised with the online copy, and any other specified PCs that have been authorised by you.

If any file within the Dropbox folder is edited and saved, those changes are automatically synchronised and reflected in the online copy and any authorised/shared PC systems.

What is even more interesting is that when a file is edited and saved, the old version is retained online, providing a history of revisions. Also, any file that is deleted on the local PC can later be recovered from the online trash bin too!

You can find out more about this very interesting product, which includes a presentation of its capabilities, and you will be notified when it is formally launched by going here:

<http://www.getdropbox.com/index#signup>

EXCEL TIPS - TRANSPOSITION

Have you ever created a worksheet, perhaps quite a complex one, and found that the presentation of the information is not exactly how you intended or you feel the information could be better presented if the columns and rows of information were reversed or “transposed”?

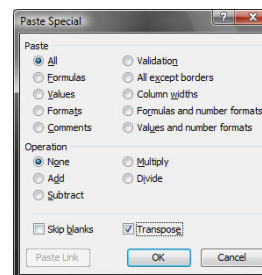
If so, then MS Excel has a feature for doing this easily, without the need to re-create the sheet.

This example uses a very simple sheet, but it adequately demonstrates the process.

1. Select the area that contains the information that requires transposing – include column headings, row labels and totals (see below):

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1							
2							
3		2005	2006	2007	YTD		
4	HQ	205.33	207.00	208.10	98.58		
5	North	53.20	54.10	48.30	9.67		
6	South	94.51	96.33	102.34	27.10		
7	South-east	15.43	16.22	13.59	4.86		
8	West	23.77	25.90	22.12	4.08		
9	Central	88.45	92.10	89.71	23.84		
10							
11	Total	480.69	491.65	484.16	168.13		
12							
13							
14							

2. Use the COPY command to copy the range of cells and columns to the clipboard memory.
3. Click on the cell in the current sheet or a sheet in another workbook if you wish, where you want to place the transposed data, and right-click. Then select PASTE SPECIAL from the drop-down menu and then click on the TRANSPOSE option (see below):



4. You can also get to the PASTE SPECIAL option by clicking on the small arrow to the right of the PASTE icon in the toolbar and selecting TRANSPOSE, which has the same effect.
5. The selected area is then copied to the new location, but the columns and rows have been transposed:

12								
13								
14								
15								
16		HQ	North	South	South-east	West	Central	Total
17	2005	205.33	53.20	94.51	15.43	23.77	88.45	480.69
18	2006	207.00	54.10	96.33	16.22	25.90	92.10	491.65
19	2007	208.10	48.30	102.34	13.59	22.12	89.71	484.16
20	YTD	98.58	9.67	27.10	4.86	4.08	23.84	168.13
21								
22								
23								
24								

Try it its easy!

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..

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