

WINDOWS 7 IS HERE

Windows 7 has finally been released, after many Beta versions, and lots of predictions on what it would be, considering the general disappointment that Vista created. While I have not yet used Windows 7, I've read reams of material and reviews on it. I do not plan to upgrade any of my XP machines. But, I am in the final planning stages for my new computer build, which of course will use Windows 7.

While there are 6 different versions of Windows 7, the reality is that only 4 are of any consequence to home users, and in my view, only 3 should be. Windows 7 Starter is a 32 bit version and seems like a poor choice in today's rapidly accelerating technology. Here are the 6 versions.

Windows 7 Starter is least-featured edition of Windows 7, and it isn't available in a 64-bit version. The desktop wallpaper, and Visual Style (Windows 7 Basic) is also not user-changeable. This edition is available pre-installed on computers through system integrators or computer manufacturers.

Windows 7 Home Basic

This edition is available in emerging markets, but it is not available in the United States.

Windows 7 Home Premium

This edition contains features aimed at the home market segment, such as Windows Media Center, Windows Aero and touch-screen controls.

Windows 7 Professional

This edition is targeted towards enthusiasts and small business users. It includes all the features of Windows 7 Home Premium, and adds the ability to participate in a Windows Server domain. Additional features include operating as a Remote Desktop server, location aware printing, Encrypting File System, Presentation Mode, Software Restriction Policies, and Windows XP Mode.

Windows 7 Enterprise

This edition targets the enterprise segment of the market and is sold through volume licensing to companies which have a Software Assurance contract with Microsoft. It is not available to home users

Windows 7 Ultimate

Windows 7 Ultimate contains the same features as Windows 7 Enterprise, but unlike that edition it is available to home users on an individual license basis.

If you are building a machine, you will have a choice of using either 32 or 64 bit version of Windows. If you are buying a ready-made machine, you may have to ask the supplier whether you are getting a 32 or 64 bit system.

32 BIT VERSUS 64 BIT

With today's technology advancements, which seem to happen overnight, as opposed to over the years, I would suggest that most people should consider a 64 bit version of Windows 7. Some of the pros and cons are -

General - 32 bit systems are essentially limited to 3 GB of RAM, which is OK today, but which may not be sufficient in the years to come. And 64 bit systems should work more rapidly than 32 bit systems.

Hardware - if you have hardware that is 4 or more years old, you may not find drivers available to install those devices. Even current hardware may not have suitable Windows 7 drivers available yet.

Software - Generally 64 bit systems can handle both 32 & 64 bit software. But there may be some older 32 bit programs that will not run properly, or at all in a 64 bit system. And a 32 bit system will not run 64 bit software.

SOLUTION TO THE COMPATIBILITY PROBLEMS

Windows 7 has a new feature that has been added to the Professional and Ultimate versions for home users. It is the perfect solution from my point of view. It allows the user to have the best of both worlds. The solution is called “XP Mode”.

If you're an intermediate or advanced computer user you can do the necessary steps to install XP Mode yourself. If you are not, have your tech advisor go through the steps to install XP Mode.

Here is a link to learn and watch a Microsoft video on XP Mode

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows7/help/videos/using-windows-xp-mode>

WHAT IS XP MODE, AND WHAT DOES IT DO FOR ME

The necessary files et al for XP Mode do not come with your Windows 7 disc, but they are available at no cost on the Microsoft site. You must have either Windows 7 Pro, or Windows 7 Ultimate to install XP Mode on your system. And your computer processor must have “Virtualization” capability, and it must be enabled. This setting is found in the BIOS settings. Once that is confirmed, the computer can install the necessary files for XP Mode.

In essence, XP Mode consists of having Windows XP SP3 32 bit installed on your machine in a special folder. This then gives you all the capabilities of XP SP3, which runs inside of Windows 7. So, any hardware or software that you have installed in an older XP system, will run exactly the same on your new Windows 7 system, via an XP window which will be brought up on your desktop.

It took me quite a while to get the following clarified, But I believe (and hope) that the following is now correct.

SOFTWARE

You must install the legacy software that won't run in Windows 7, into Windows XP Mode, just as you always install software. An icon for this can be placed on the XP desktop, and also on the Windows 7 desktop, if desired. XP software installed in XP Mode will run by double clicking its icon. And, in XP Mode, you can also run the Windows 7 software in conjunction with the XP software. So, if you should have a screen capture program installed in Win 7, you could also use it while you were working in XP Mode. But, the reverse is not true.

HARDWARE

As with the software, you can install any hardware which you used on your previous XP system, in XP Mode on your new system. But unlike the software interaction capability, hardware installed in XP Mode, can only be used while in XP Mode. However, hardware installed in Windows 7, can be accessed while in XP mode. So, if your printer was installed in Windows 7, you can print to it from XP Mode.

MY NEW COMPUTER

I will be building my new Windows 7 computer early in 2010. I will be using Windows 7 Pro 64 bit, and I will be installing XP Mode. Once I have his system up and running, I will have more info, tips, and suggestions on the new Windows 7 operating system. And, I'm sure there will be some “hiccups” along the way, and some caveats that I will learn from. So I will be generating more articles about all of this as time goes on. It does look like Microsoft got things “right” this time, and I am anxious to move into the new world of Windows 7.

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