

The experts' advice on Vista: Don't rush to upgrade

East Bay Business Times - March 9, 2007

by [Michael Fitzhugh](#)

For businesses eager to take advantage of Microsoft Corp.'s Windows Vista operating system, local experts have one word of advice: Wait - at least three to six months.

"Our clients are asking about it like crazy," said Josh Carroll, COO of Endsight, a Berkeley-based IT management company supporting 2,000 users.

"The third-party software just isn't ready yet."

For instance, Carroll noted that Sonicwall, remote access software on which many of his clients rely, isn't yet Vista-compatible. Also, he said, a common Hewlett-Packard Co. printer he purchased less than a year ago still isn't supported in Vista. HP says it has created drivers for the majority of its printers and is working to complete the rest soon.

Several major applications - including those in Adobe Systems Inc.'s creative suite, security software from Symantec Corp. and the Firefox Web browser - have yet to appear on Microsoft's list of software compatible with or certified for Vista.

"The way we position technology for our clients is as a money maker," Carroll said. When companies install Vista, he expects the process will be expensive in terms of training and adjustment.

"The look and feel are different. The buttons are in different places. So rolling it out to people in the field, there's going to be a loss of productivity for a few days as people get used to it," Carroll said.

Patrick Tardif, a Pleasant Hill software developer and CEO of Tiersolution Inc., is advising his colleagues to wait six months to a year before diving into Vista.

"Which new features are you getting by upgrading your software? Are you really getting features that will make you productive?" he asked.



Good

Bit Locker: A transparent data encryption feature that will protect sensitive data

Instant Search: Indexes documents, email and photos while you work for faster results

Super Fetch: Prioritizes your most frequent-used Applications and documents for quick access

Needs some work:

Third-party software: A few minor applications and drivers still not Vista-ready

WiFi Settings: Wireless configuration is radically different than in Windows XP

Chatty Security: Security system is flexible, but too Verbose with default settings.

"I think it's going to save customers a lot of money in terms of avoiding down time, especially due to security vulnerabilities," Carroll said. Although he called the security system "verbose," he said it is adjustable.

Tod McKelvey, an Endsight client, is particularly interested in Vista's BitLocker hard drive encryption, which can more easily protect information stored on a drive. McKelvey is executive director of Alamo law firm Berding & Weil LLP and a director at Diablo Valley Bank.

In either enterprise, it would be "very bad" to get a laptop or desktop computer with client info on it stolen, McKelvey said. But with BitLocker it would be harder for thieves to access the information.

McKelvey is also excited about Vista's new instant search feature.

"We do a lot of real-time lawyering here," trying to provide legal services right away, he said. "I'd like e-mail search to go faster because it's now becoming as much a document component (of casework) as a means of communication."

A powerful behind-the-scenes feature allows Vista to adapt to individual users faster than ever before, learning which documents and applications a user accesses most frequently. Called Windows SuperFetch, it prioritizes a computer's resources to best support those items, making the system feel more responsive.

Despite such promising features, McKelvey is apprehensive around major upgrades and said he'll probably roll Vista out to just a small subset of his firm's lawyers at first.

Microsoft is well aware of the potential pitfalls a big upgrade can bring. To help businesses avoid potential Vista troubles, it has released Application Compatibility Toolkit 5.0, which can help companies determine whether their applications are compatible with Vista before deploying it. Another Microsoft utility, Windows Vista Hardware Assessment 1.0, can assess the hardware readiness of a company's computers.

Some organizations addressed potential hardware compatibility issues by buying new machines. The Emeryville Chamber of Commerce chose to replace its 4 1/2-year-old machines with new Dells marketed as Vista-ready. But the chamber, which uses Adobe's Dreamweaver to create its weekly e-mail newsletter, may need to hold off on Vista until Adobe declares Dreamweaver Vista-compatible.

"If you compare it to all previous releases of the operating system in the past, this one really requires more investment," said Tardif. "It's a bigger step."

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