

# Windows 7 on the way: What should you do?

July 29 2009, By Brier Dudley

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Now that Microsoft has finished Windows 7, computer users may be wondering what to do next.

Especially people frustrated with Windows Vista machines or nursing along older systems, waiting for something better.

Windows 7 is indeed better, but that doesn't mean everyone should rush out and install it when the [software](#) becomes generally available Oct. 22.

Here are a few questions and answers, for those wondering what they should do about Windows 7.

## WHY SHOULD I UPGRADE TO WINDOWS 7?

If you're perfectly happy with your PC, don't bother.

You can run the system until the hardware wears out or Microsoft and other software makers stop supporting the programs you are using. But computers don't run forever. Hard drives eventually fail and support for XP-era software will dwindle soon.

## IS WINDOWS 7 BETTER?

Yes, it is faster, apparently more stable and presumably more secure than Microsoft's previous operating systems.

Every computer pro I've talked to loves the software. Most upgraded their personal computers to Windows 7 months ago, using test versions.

"I have never been more comfortable with an [operating system](#) than I have been with this one," said Jon Bach, president of Puget Systems, an Auburn PC maker that specializes in high-performance game systems.

Bach said his only significant problem so far was an early test version conflicting with an anti-virus program, but it was resolved quickly.

Windows 7 has lots of new features. One makes it easier to connect and use devices such as cameras and printers. Another helps find and share files stored on multiple PCs on a network, creating handy shared "libraries."

It's also smarter about power usage, automatically stopping unused processes to extend [laptop battery life](#), for instance.

Windows 7 starts faster than Vista, requires less memory and has handy new controls, including shortcuts for navigating multiple windows open on a desktop.

## HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

Windows 7 Home Premium -- the standard version for consumers -- will cost \$199 or \$119 to upgrade from Vista. A "Professional" business version will cost \$299 or \$199 for upgrades.

The best deal for consumers with multiple computers to upgrade is a "family pack" with three upgrade copies. Microsoft hasn't disclosed its price yet, but some online stores offered it early for about \$140.

## WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE A VISTA PC?

Some people don't mind Vista; others hate it and can't wait to upgrade.

If Vista annoys you enough to spend \$119 on the upgrade or you want the latest and best software on your PC, it won't be too hard to upgrade.

Microsoft says most computers that run Vista will run Windows 7 just fine.

Upgrade disks will give you two options -- a simple "upgrade" that keeps files, settings and programs, and a "custom" installation that erases the hard drive. Either way you should back up your files first.

Microsoft and PC makers are putting extra effort into the upgrade process this time around. Hewlett-Packard, for instance, built an "upgrade assistant" to identify and preinstall most needed drivers. That said, it's still an intimidating project for technophobes.

## WHAT IF I'M USING WINDOWS XP?

It's a bit more complicated to upgrade to Windows 7, because you'll have to first erase the hard drive, load Windows 7, then reload your programs and files.

## WHAT IF I NEED A NEW COMPUTER BEFORE WINDOWS 7 IS AVAILABLE OCT. 22?

Most Vista PCs sold today include a coupon for a free upgrade to Windows 7.

The coupons do not come with PCs running XP, including most bargain "netbook" mini-laptops.

There are a few downsides to buying a PC now vs. waiting for one preloaded with Windows 7. PC makers are fine-tuning their upcoming machines for Windows 7. Some will also put new Windows 7 applications onto machines they sell after Oct. 22, especially PCs with touchscreens.

New PC models will surface around the time Windows 7 launches. That also means there may be some deals on today's systems for those who can't wait and don't care about the latest hardware.

## CAN MY COMPUTER HANDLE WINDOWS 7?

You can download a free tool from Microsoft that checks to see if your computer can handle Windows 7. Search for "windows 7 upgrade advisor" at [microsoft.com](http://microsoft.com).

The minimum hardware requirements are 1-gigahertz or faster processor, 1 gigabyte of RAM (2 gigs for a 64-bit system), 16 gigabytes of hard-disk space (or 20 gigs for 64-bit) and a graphics system that supports DirectX 9 and WDDM 1.0 or higher driver.

But that's just the minimum. Puget Systems' Bach said that if he were building a Windows 7 system for, say, his parents, he'd use a low-end quad core processor, such as Intel's Q8200, "and I'd go ahead and put 4

gigs of memory in there because it's so cheap."

Before shoehorning Windows 7 onto an older PC, I'd check prices of low-end PCs.

## WHAT ABOUT MY OLDER PROGRAMS?

Microsoft says most programs designed for Vista will work with Windows 7. It gets trickier with programs designed for XP.

To accommodate XP users with big investments in older programs -- namely businesses -- [Microsoft](#) is offering a free add-on for [Windows 7](#) that runs a virtual version of XP supporting older programs. But check the "Windows XP Mode" system requirements; it takes extra memory and doesn't work with all current processors.

## SHOULD I DO ANYTHING NOW TO PREPARE?

You don't have to, but all PC users should regularly back up their files somehow.

One way to do this is to buy an external hard drive for about \$70 to \$100. You can use it to back up files now, and again before any future system upgrades.

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Citation: Windows 7 on the way: What should you do? (2009, July 29) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-07-windows.html>

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