

Upgrade to Windows 7? It all depends...

October 8 2009, By Steve Alexander



With Windows 7 scheduled for release Oct. 22, the question many readers will be asking is, "Should I upgrade?" The answer depends on your circumstances.

If you're frustrated with Windows Vista because it crashes or is slow, you should definitely upgrade to Windows 7. I've been using a preview copy of Windows 7, and I prefer it to Vista because it's more stable and faster.

In a review of Windows 7 prior to its release, the technical Web site ZDNet.com said that "subjectively, the change from Vista to Windows 7 is like releasing a car's handbrake." For details, see blogs.zdnet.com/BTL/?p=22006.

If Vista is working for you, you don't need to upgrade. The Windows 7 user experience won't be that much different because the improvements are largely "under the hood," such as more efficient use of memory, which causes a PC to start up faster and use fewer of the PC's resources while it runs.

If you've got a PC that's more than three years old and runs Windows XP, you may not want to upgrade. ZDNet.com said that while Windows 7 was faster than [Windows XP](#), XP "remains more capable for devices with limited memory and outdated graphics."

You can find system requirements for Windows 7 at www.microsoft.com/windows/wind...em-requirements.aspx, and upgrade advice at www.microsoft.com/windows/wind...upgrade-advisor.aspx.

Are there any new PCs that can't run Windows 7? Microsoft says no. ZDNet says the only new PCs that aren't suitable are netbooks (downsized laptops) that use the least-capable Intel Atom processor. Note: The optional XP Mode for Windows 7, which can be downloaded for free, has a special requirement: chips that include Intel "virtualization technology" or AMD-V processor chips.

Question: I have Windows Vista on a [desktop PC](#) (32-bit version) and a [laptop](#) (64-bit version), and both PCs have 4 gigabytes of RAM. If I upgrade to Windows 7, would it make sense to install the 64-bit version on both PCs? Will I need to reload programs or data after the upgrade?

Answer: The chief advantage of the 64-bit version of Windows 7 is that it can use more than 4 gigabytes of RAM (useful if you add RAM later); 32-bit Windows 7 can't do it.

You can install 64-bit Windows 7 on both PCs, but not easily. Back up your data first.

Your 64-bit Vista laptop will upgrade smoothly to 64-bit Windows 7. Most programs should make the transfer (firewalls may not.)

Your 32-bit Vista desktop is too dissimilar from 64-bit [Windows 7](#) for an upgrade. It needs a "clean install" that wipes out everything.

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