What to do before upgrading to Apple's OS X Mavericks

October 30 2013, by Chris O'brien

If you own a MacBook laptop or a Mac desktop computer, then Apple's decision to make OS X Mavericks available as a free download may have you itching to upgrade.

What's not to like about free, right?

And there are certainly some nice goodies that would make this a worthwhile update. There's a fresh, new look along with potentially longer **battery life**. And along with new features such as iBooks, some stalwarts like Safari, Maps and Calendar all get some snazzy improvements.

But before you hit the download button, there are a few things you might want to know about Mavericks and your own machine.

First, you'll want to check that your Mac or MacBook is actually compatible. Chances are that it is, since Apple seems to be trying to make it as widely available as possible.

Still, Apple's official list of machines that can run Mavericks is as follows: iMacs bought as far back as mid-2007; MacBooks as old as the late 2008 aluminum model or newer; MacBook Pro models from mid- to late 2007 or newer; MacBook Air models from late 2008 or newer; Mac Mini models from early 2009 or newer; Mac Pro from early 2008 or newer; and Xserve from early 2009.

One tip for people who have some of the oldest machines that are still eligible: You might want to wait just a few weeks before installing Mavericks and check to see what kind of experience people are having with it.

In my house, we installed iOS 7 right away on our iPhone 4, causing it to seriously slow down. And once you update, it's hard to unwind it. Now one family member quietly resents me and seethes every time she uses her iPhone. So a little patience might save some anxiety later.

Once you've checked your hardware, it's time to check your software.

Apple says you can upgrade to OS X Mavericks directly if you're running Snow Leopard (version 10.6.8), Lion (10.7) or Mountain Lion (10.8).

If you're running a version of Snow Leopard older than the 10.6.8 version, then you have to update to the latest version of Snow Leopard before you can install Mavericks.

If you're still running Leopard (10.5) - meaning you haven't updated in six years and probably aren't even reading this from your cave in the Himalayas where there's no Wi-Fi - then you have to buy Snow Leopard first, which will cost $19.99.

Almost ready to go.

Next, you'll want to back up all of your data, which you should be doing on a regular basis anyway. If you're not, take five minutes to feel a deep sense of shame.

Now pick your head up and get started with the backup. You can do this using an external hard drive. Or you can use an Apple feature called

"Time Capsule." To find it, go to "System Preferences" and then click on "Time Machine." From there, choose "Select Disk" and then pick your Time Capsule from the list.

Now you can go to the App Store to download and then install Mavericks. This next part can take an hour or more, depending on your Internet connection speed and the speed of your machine. So certainly don't try to do this when you're in a rush, or you'll get frustrated.

Once Mavericks is up and running, it's time to check all the new goodies.

The first thing to notice is that, like iOS 7 on Apple's mobile devices, Mavericks discards a lot of the old design elements that were used to mimic real-world items, such as the fake leather texture on applications such as the calendar and address book.

Perhaps one of the most important changes, according to Apple, is one that may not be immediately obvious. The company says that for many MacBooks, Mavericks offers so many new energy-efficient features that it could add up to an extra hour of battery life.

Next is iBooks, which was created three years ago for the first iPad. But it's taken until now for Apple to allow you to read the e-books you buy through the Apple store on your Mac.

The Apple Maps app has also been updated to make it easier to search for directions on your Mac and then send them to your iPhone. In the upper left-hand corner there's a new share button to let you do this.

The Safari Web browser also gets an interesting update with a new sidebar that lets see your list of bookmarks and reading list. But it also allows you to add your social media accounts from Twitter and LinkedIn and will generate a list of links that your friends have posted on those

services.

There's more to discover, of course. But it's time to get out and explore on your own.

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