



Windows 7: Is it Right for You?

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Windows 7 has been all over the news this fall, but then again, so was Windows Vista. Naturally, businesses of all sizes have been thinking about upgrading to the latest Windows operating system. The switch to may be natural for your home PC, but what about at the office? While some analysts argue that it is inevitable for businesses that skipped Windows Vista and stuck with XP- if they want to keep up, they'll have to consider the upgrade. We asked Michael, our resident Sage Pro guru what he thought about the switch and what it would mean to you as a Sage Pro User.

Michael's Two-Cents:

Currently, the only version of Sage Pro that Sage has certified for use in Windows 7 is Sage Pro 2010. For those of you that are still running previous versions of Sage Pro, it is still possible to work in the new operating system, via XP Mode which is really a full install of XP Pro in a virtual environment. XP Mode is integrated with the Windows 7 environment and therefore users should still have all the network connections and peripherals accessible to any applications installed in the XP Mode environment. You can read more about this below.

Here's a peek at the pros and cons to the upgrade, looking specifically at the advantages and drawbacks small to medium sized businesses like yours might encounter in the switch to Windows 7.

Yes, You Should Upgrade to Windows 7

You can still use XP apps. Get Windows 7 speeds, while running applications designed for the eight-year-old XP with XP Mode. This free, downloadable add-on for the Pro, Enterprise, and Ultimate versions of Windows 7 lets your old programs run as if native to Windows 7.

Better search. Finally, you don't have to worry about employees being organized when it comes to digital data. In Windows 7, it's the results that count. You can narrow the returns on the fly when you get too many. The search bar retains a history of what you've looked for, so you can quickly find things again. There's a better preview available for search results, as well.

Your driver is here. Older systems had a hard time with Vista upgrades due to lack of driver support for the hardware. Heck, so did some newer systems. That's unlikely to be the case with Windows 7. It has more in common with Vista than not, and Vista's had lots of time to get all the hardware support it needs. Better yet, Windows 7 is designed to go directly to the driver download pages of major vendors if a compatible driver isn't found.

DirectAccess may be the best access. DirectAccess is just that: direct access to your business network from anywhere,

via secured tunneling using [IPsec](#) and [IPv6](#)—without the use of a [trusted](#) virtual private network (VPN). Don't worry about IPv6 costs—Windows 7 comes with IPv6-to-IPv4 transition technology that integrates with current networks. It's a whole new way for connecting securely. The catch: Your network has to run [Windows Server 2008 R2](#), so this solution won't work for offices without dedicated IT staff. If you do have Windows [Server](#), it'll only take you a few clicks to connect clients via the Web. It's significantly easier than setting up a VPN server. Users can be authenticated with Active Directory, so the Windows 7 solution not only provides network permissions, but can push software updates to users as if they're connected to the business intranet.

Better enterprise features. There's a lot of good stuff in Windows 7 Enterprise (which is essentially Windows 7 Ultimate bundled on corporate OEM systems) besides DirectAccess, specifically for security and management. That includes [BitLocker](#), which encrypts entire hard drives, and [BitLocker to Go](#), which does the same on removable USB flash drives. AppLocker lets IT pros specify exactly what programs are run on Windows 7 systems, so users can't bring in games from home. And more languages are supported. None of these features need Windows Server 2008 R2 to function, but it is necessary to have Server 2008 if you want to use the Windows 7 Advance Group Policy Management 4.0 tools to control them from afar.

Less user annoyance This might be subjective, but anyone who used Vista at all to install a program knows the heart-stopping fear that hit when a screen went blank for a split second. But instead of a crash, it was a feature, not a bug, part of the [User Account Control](#) (UAC) that forced you to approve installation of programs (among other things). UAC is still in Windows 7, but it's far less intrusive. Plus the control panel for it got infinitely simpler, with just a slider-bar to indicated just how much control it should have.

64 whole bits. Not that you couldn't get a 64-bit version of Vista, but every box with Windows 7 comes with both the 32- and the 64-bit version inside. You'll want the latter if your hardware can support it. 64-bit will work, for example, with more than 4GB of RAM; if you've got an older CPU and less RAM than that, don't bother. You only get one activation key, however, even if it looks like there are two versions of the OS in the box. (Use the free [SecurAble](#) utility to determine if your system can even handle a 64-bit OS. Microsoft also offers an [Upgrade Advisor](#).)

Less useless bloatware. Say good-bye to unused extras like Windows Mail or Movie Maker. You'll have to get them from Window Live's Web site in the future—if you even want them. (See below for more on MSPaint and WordPad, however.) That won't stop system vendors from shoving some [shovelware](#) onto your company computers if you get them at retail; for that, use [The PC Decrapifier](#) for a pre-use cleanup.

More work time. In our [tests in PC Labs](#), we found that Windows 7 boots up several seconds faster than Vista on identical hardware. That's precious time during which your employees can be productive! Okay, that'll last only a while, until installing new software and everyday use slow down start time, but with the right hardware, Windows 7 should zing along plenty fast in all uses.

Don't Do It, Keep Your Business with XP

No learning curve. There's a hidden cost when you upgrade users to an OS with as many significant interface changes as [Windows 7](#): training. Windows 7 is a looker and features big improvements, especially over XP. But, after almost a decade, users know XP backwards

and forwards and getting them up to speed on [Windows 7](#) might take time your company can't afford. Even programs like WordPad and MSPaint have a new interface (the Ribbon from [Microsoft Office 2007](#)), which could make some users apoplectic.

XP updates until 2014. You might feel you have to upgrade to Windows 7 because eventually [Microsoft](#) will stop patching XP for security and other issues. And it will. But do you consider five years from now soon? If you're happy with XP (and can live without the tech support from Microsoft, which ended earlier this year), why change?

No direct XP upgrades. Think you can just pop a Windows 7 disc into a system and upgrade the OS but leave your [software](#) and data intact? Think again. Microsoft is only allowing "in-place" upgrades from Vista—XP users have to format their drives and do a clean install. [LapLink](#) has an elegant solution, iYogi, for one, is offering "migration assistance" to help move data (but not programs), but either will cost you money and time to use. If you're okay with the nuke-and-boot-and-reinstall scenario, do it; why upgrade and wonder if XP is responsible for new Windows 7 problems?

New hardware needed. You've been running XP for years just fine on computers that were the top of the line in 2001. The chances of them supporting Windows 7 are slim. We're not talking just upgrading a couple of components—it's going to be time to get all-new systems, which can be costly, even if computers are cheaper today. Remember, at the very least, you need 1GB of RAM and 16GB of disk space just to install the 32-bit version of Windows 7. You need even more RAM and disk space to go 64-bit or to run XP Mode. Furthermore, installation from disc requires a DVD drive. You can get around that requirement, however, by copying the files to a bootable USB [flash drive](#); instructions are available online in various places, [including here](#). Slipstreaming the install on to a USB drive has the added bonus of giving you the same Windows 7 image to put on all the company computers.

The advances coming out of Windows 7 may be more evolution than revolution, but that doesn't mean they're not great for your company *if* you've got the right equipment, and the money to buy it, and users capable of handling the change. If so, take the plunge. You'll likely find the upgraded OS has an interface, security, search, and more to like. But if you don't like it, be sure to let us know.

So how does Sage Pro 2010 work and feel in a Windows 7 environment? Well, it works and feels just like Sage Pro 2010! There is no ground-breaking difference or improvement in performance.

Users on older versions of Sage Pro could potentially experience slower processing speeds in XP Mode than if you were to run the same Sage Pro version in a true Windows XP environment. And this is primarily due to the need to run Sage Pro in a virtual environment. For those that are unfamiliar with virtualization, think of XP Mode as a program inside Windows 7, and that program uses up processing power and memory of the host computer just to run it. On top of that, install Sage Pro 2010 inside XP Mode, and now you have the idea of a complete ERP program running inside another program inside Windows 7. How your Sage Pro will run depends on how powerful your PC is.

Overall, Windows 7 is still a refreshing change from XP and I would encourage office users to give it a try. Having full Sage certification for use with Sage Pro 2010 is assuring. I cannot speak for other critical applications that you use daily, and I encourage you or your IT department to research before switching. Coupled with the assurance that your older applications will run in XP Mode, switching to Windows 7 may not be as scary as you think.

If you are still reluctant to dive in, why not assign someone at the office to be the designated Windows 7 lab rat and have that person's PC switch over to Windows 7? See how it works and go from there.