



November Newsletter: Our Windows 7 Review for Business Users

Hello!

Windows 7 is out. And as we're sure you know, the press has been gaga over it. Never before has Microsoft had so many positive reviews for such a big product. Those of you who know us well know that we don't trust mass media, and we like to look out for our customers when recommending new software or equipment – especially to our business clients. We've been testing the beta version of Windows 7 ourselves since last year, and after using the final version for about a month, we're ready to give our assessment. Next week, we'll also feature some Windows 7 tech tips via our Twitter feed, at twitter.com/cartwheelit.

All the best,
Rafi and Josh
Founders, Cartwheel

Windows 7: The Official Cartwheel Review

The main reasons businesses upgrade to a new operating system are usually: a) speed, b) stability or c) new features. Growing businesses also need to consider whether to buy new computers with Windows 7, or wait to upgrade everyone together.

So should your business upgrade Windows 7? We'll look at all the factors above, as well compatibility and financial issues so you can make an informed decision.

Is it faster?

Yes. First of all, your computer will almost certainly boot up faster. This is a huge improvement, and cannot be understated. All business users hate waiting. Most applications will launch faster, too. Software that relies on your network or video cards, such as internet applications or graphic design applications will stay the same. We should mention that one thing we've noticed as painfully slower is deleting large files; which is strange, but consistently the case.

Is it more stable?

No. Windows XP has been around for many years, and Microsoft and its add-on vendors (printer and scanner manufacturers, software developers, etc.) have improved its stability to the point at which we consider it a very solid platform. We've already experienced the dreaded "blue screen" with Windows 7. That said, we believe it will become as stable, if not more stable, than Windows XP in the coming year.



The new features:

Other than a new user interface, which is nice but hardly critical for a business, there are really only three new features worth taking about. We were impressed by: the "Previous Version" feature; the ability to encrypt a hard drive; and the ability to make an "image" of your entire hard drive.

The Previous Version feature, which has existed for Windows servers for years, keeps "snapshots" of certain files and allows you to go back to previous versions of them even after the files have been closed. For instance, if you accidentally deleted a paragraph in your Word document, you could go back to a version from a few hours before to recover it. This is a welcome addition, but not foolproof since it only takes snapshots periodically. It's also not a substitute for a backup system, as it doesn't take snapshots of everything.

The hard drive encryption feature is only available in the Professional and Ultimate versions of Windows 7. It's important for companies with extremely sensitive information in their travelling laptops. It slows the computer down a bit, but it's a big security upgrade.

Finally, the ability to make an entire copy ("image") of your hard drive, a feature which has been around for decades with inexpensive software, is nice and we recommend using it... but in all likelihood, businesses who want this feature probably already have it.

Compatibility and costs

Businesses have a couple of hurdles to clear when considering upgrading. The first hurdle is to make sure all existing software is compatible. Unfortunately, the only way is to check with every software or equipment vendor separately. Be aware that they are not always forthright. For example, Intuit claims that Quickbooks 2009 is not compatible, and refuses to support it. It does however, work fine, but Intuit forces you to upgrade to Quickbooks 2010 to get technical support. The second is that upgrading the computers is a bit of work, which costs time and money. Once you jump those hurdles, you are ready. In general, we recommend starting with one computer, and once a proven Windows 7 computer is working on your network, upgrading the others.

Final thoughts

All in all, we like Windows 7. While the new features are nothing to shout about, and the stability is, as expected, not yet flawless, the improved speed made a big impression, and the interface has grown on us. The good news is that unlike with Vista, any compatibility issues will get sorted out soon and Windows 7 will be, in our opinion, the best Microsoft operating system yet.

If you'd like to discuss Windows 7 and your business, just give us a call at 212 206 9619.