



November Newsletter: Our Windows 7 Review for Home Users

Hello!

Windows 7 has gained the most favorable press for Microsoft since... well, since forever. 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. 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. Keep reading. 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 people upgrade to a new operating system are usually: a) they hope it's faster, b) they hope it's more stable, c) they want a new user interface, or d) they want new features.

So should you get Windows 7? We'll look at all the factors above, and let you make an educated decision. By the way, we're assuming that your current computer exceeds (not meets) Microsoft's minimum recommendations for Windows 7, and that you're coming from Windows XP. If you're coming from Vista, stop reading, and just upgrade. ;)

Is it faster?

Yes. First of all, your computer will almost certainly boot up faster. This is a huge improvement, and cannot be understated. We hate waiting. Applications will launch faster, too. Other than that, things that rely on your network or graphics cards, such as web surfing or game playing, 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 way. Windows XP has been around for many years, and Microsoft and its peripheral 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.



Is the user interface nicer?

It is. In general, the interface is slicker, more modern, and more fun. Let's face it: Windows XP was getting old. However, the Windows 7 interface is not really any easier to use than XP. The biggest change for XP users will be the very Mac-like "dock," which takes some getting used to, but is handy once it's mastered. The icons on the desktop are boxy, but we got accustomed to them after a few days. The new shortcuts are mostly keyboard-driven – and in truth, the most useful ones were already around in Windows XP. The alt+tab functionality (which allows users to jump quickly between applications) is actually a bit slower now because it uses real-time images of the live application rather than the simple static icons used before.

The new features

Other than a new user interface, 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 those who store sensitive information on the computer (electronic bank statements, scanned copies of ID documents, etc.), or especially if you have a laptop. 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, which has been around for decades with inexpensive software, is nice and we recommend using it... but in all likelihood, people who want this feature probably already have it.

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.

Before deciding to upgrade or buy a new computer with Windows 7, home users should consider compatibility issues. For example, Quicken 2009 and earlier are not supported on Windows 7, even though it generally works fine. Also, if you connect to the office from your computer, check



with your IT department since some VPN (Virtual Private Network) software may not work properly. Peripheral devices such as printers and scanners are scrambling to provide upgraded software, but you can expect some strange results and lost functionality until everyone sorts it out. The good news is that unlike with Vista, these things will get sorted out soon and Windows 7 will be, in our opinion, the best Microsoft operating system yet.

If you are a client thinking of upgrading, but are concerned about compatibility, just give us a call at 212 206 9619. We can walk you through the decision as well as help you with the install (which can be tricky).