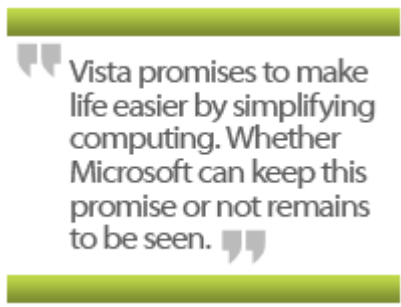# INTRODUCING…WINDOWS VISTA – PART I

The Bells and Whistles of Microsoft's Latest Operating System.

Are you ready for a brand new day? You may have heard it, seen it fleetingly in neighborhood electronic shops, and it didn't make big headlines like the debut of the Macintosh during Super Bowl Sunday or become the "End of the World as We Know It." The "it" here is Microsoft's successor to its hugely popular Windows XP operating system, Windows Vista.

Vista was finally released to the public on January 30, 2007, five and a half years in the making. The positives: Vista drastically improves upon security (sometimes to the point of annoyance) and sports a more intuitive look and feel. The negatives: As in any release of the Windows OS, you need to have relatively new hardware to run it, and running it on the "minimum" specification won't get you anywhere but frustrated.

> " Vista promises to make life easier by simplifying computing. Whether Microsoft can keep this promise or not remains to be seen. "

Of course, as was common in their XP software, there are multiple versions of Vista and not all versions come with the same features. All in all, it's a worthy successor to its siblings, moving Windows closer to "Mac-like" proportions.

We present a rundown of Vista's features below.

A New Attitude – Vista's Improved Look and Feel

Vista takes a drastic detour from its predecessors by taking advantage of recent improvements in graphical technology and rendering crisp, smooth graphics – the Aero glass interface. Aero, available

in all Vista releases except for Home Basic, is an acronym for Authentic, Energetic, Reflective and Open. The "glass" in glass windows (after all, isn't glass what windows are made of?) intends to be simple, reflective, and transparent. Thumbnails provide visual details about a minimized application on the Task Bar and when switching between Wind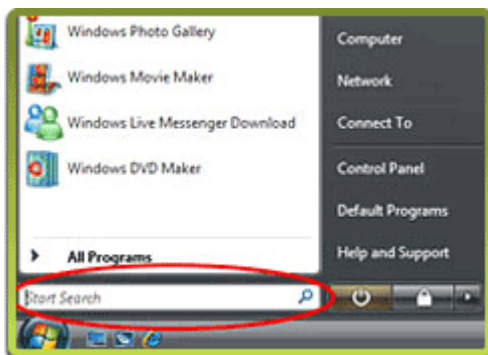ows applications using Alt + Tab and Windows + Tab (renamed Flip and Flip 3D). Essentially, you can now preview each application's contents before switching tasks.

Other desktop improvements include a smaller Start button and the removal of most desktop icons so you can maximize screen real estate. The Start menu adapts to your needs depending on what you've opened recently. Commonly used programs appear on the Start Menu's left column and any programs that don't appear in the recent list are accessible by clicking on the "All Programs" option above the search box.
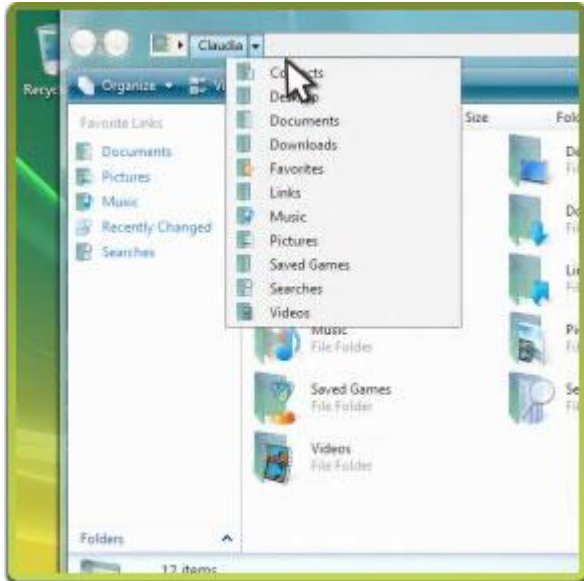
Integrated Search Capabilities

Users now have the ability to conduct complete searches of all applications, documents, links, and emails for matching terms from the Start menu and incremental searches from within specific applications like Media Player, Windows Explorer, Windows Mail, Control Panel, and the Network Center. You can further tag and add meta-data(like author and file descriptors) to search results, and save these results in Virtual Folders that are accessible in Windows Explorer. You also have the ability to launch programs by typing the name of the program in the Search box, eliminating the need to go to Start and

then Run. Remote searches are now possible across shared computers and networks.

Interactive Windows Explorer

Unless you're a Windows geek dead set on running programs from the command line, anything that simplifies opening and viewing files has to be infinitely better. Adding to this is the concept of "breadcrumbs" so you can trace your way back through the operating system's organizational hierarchy in the address bar (eliminating the need to click on the Back button) and the addition of live icons that allow you to preview the contents before opening the application (much like previewing emails in Outlook). Plus, you can navigate to websites using the address bar.

Other changes include improved filtering, sorting, grouping and stacking of items and tweaks to menu items we've become accustomed to. Common types of programs are now clustered in program "Centers", and the traditional File, Edit, and View menus have been reduced to Organize, Views, Save Search and Search Tools, and the list of folders on the left side of Explorer has become the Favorite Links (Documents, Pictures, Music, Recently Changed, and more folders). To restore the old views, simply go to the Organize menu button, select on the Layout option, and make sure the Menu Bar option is checked.

Anchoring Sidebar

New to Vista is a pane that docks on the right side of the screen and displays gadgets, or miniature applications that are supposed to make life easier. The gadgets include a Calculator, Clock, Calendar, Notepad, Slideshow, and the ability to display RSS headlines (Vista is now natively "RSS aware"). You can also drag and drop these applets directly onto your desktop if you choose forego the Sidebar.
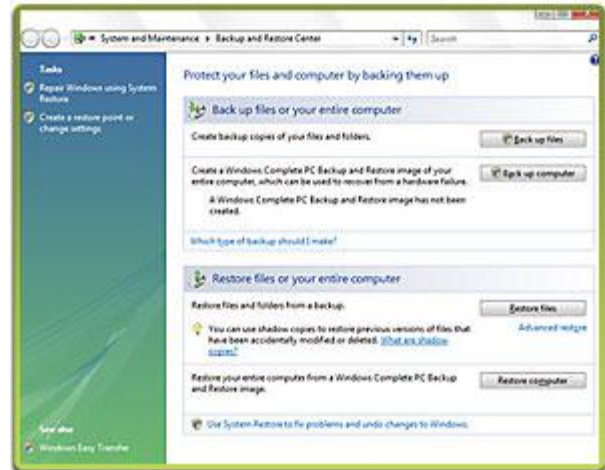
Improved Security

With Vista, Microsoft has added improvements that close some security loopholes (like blocking access to the kerneland running applications in "protected mode"). Windows Firewall now provides outbound as well as inbound protection, andInternet Explorer 7 runs in a protected modeto guard against potential attacks during browsing. Also included are an improved User Account Control (even administrators must confirm changes to the OS with a password!) and native parental control software (restricting children's access to certain applications, web sites, games and files, hours of activity, and activity logs). Windows Defender scans for spyware in the background so it doesn't interfere with existing processes. Additionally, Vista Ultimate and Enterpriseversions include a new program called BitLocker Drive Encryption.
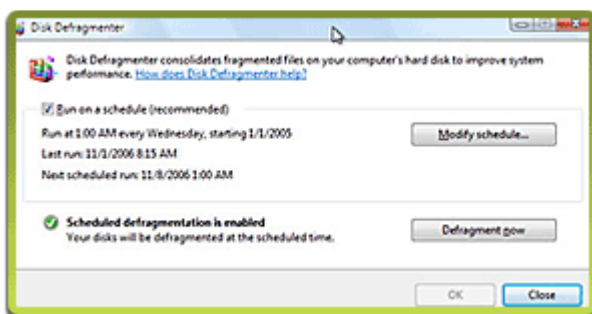
Improved Backup and Restore Functionality

Complete PC Backup, the new program that comes bundled with Vista Enterprise and Ultimate versions, resembles Norton Ghostby using disk imagingduring the backup process. Also included are version control indexing of files so you can roll back to previous versions and the ability to handle a variety of backup devices and media.

Better Hardware Support and Improved System Performance

Among the highlighted improvements in Vista are power management and self-tuning diagnostics, like the automatic scheduling to de-fragment your hard drive (this, however, is not available in Home Basic). Changes in the OS kernel now improve low-level functions like scheduling and processor synchronization. Vista also introduced a new product called SideShow, which supports auxiliary devices like secondary screens on mobile PCs).

Exclusive to Vista isDirectX 10. Utilizing advances in graphics architecture, DX10 runs more efficiently and much faster. DX10 is a major plus for all you PC gaming fans out there.

New tools in Vista now manage your PC's memory to boost speed and performance. SuperFetch tracks and preloads frequently used programs on a user-by-user basis. If you've got a USB drive or hybrid hard disk, you could dedicate available space towards the swap file usingReadyBoost. Additionally, ReadyDrive provides added support for hybrid drives by

allowing you to use the hybrid's built-in flash memory towards re-booting or resuming your PC session.

New Applications

Microsoft wouldn't be Microsoft without making Third Party Vendors' lives miserable by including new applications that take advantage of capabilities in the new operating system. However, this can be a boon for consumers on a tight budget, especially given Vista's price tag. Among the new applications and technology support entering the Vista family are:

Media Player11 in Vista Home Premium and Ultimate versions support HD-DVD, MMC-5 (Fifth-Generation SCSI Multi-Media Command Set) and UDF (Universal Disk Format) formats.

Media Center (Home Premium and Ultimate) supports dual tuner cards, DVD's, MPEG2, and high definition content.

DVD Maker – now, you can create and burn your own DVD's without resorting to third party software.

Photo Gallery provides management and basic editing of digital photo archives.

New games, like Chess Titans, that feed off improvements on graphics capabilities.

Revamped Applications

And the existing applications? Here are the changes – some good, some bad:

Meeting Space replaces the old NetMeeting and is a peer-to-peer, collaborative application permitting you to share applications with users across networks. It's much like another Microsoft

product, Groove, albeit limited in scope.

Windows Mail replaces Outlook Express and now includes anti-phishing and anti-spam
solutions.

Internet Explorer 7, with tabbed browsing, enhanced security and incremental page searches. A
version for Windows XP is available, though it does not run in protected mode under that OS.

Microsoft Fax and Scan – now available in only the Enterprise and Ultimate editions.

Finally, don't let the minimum specs of Vista fool you. Meeting the minimum hardware specifications
lets Vista run at a crawl, if it runs at all. Remember this as you think about upgrading your existing
machine. If you have a Vista-approved machine, installing the software is easy. Vista now uses
image-based setups instead of the time-draining chore of first copying temporary files down to
yourhard drive and then running the setup.

Windows Vista is a major reworking of previous Windows releases. It promises to make life easier by
simplifying computing. Whether this is true or not remains to be seen. One thing is sure, however;
Microsoft does pay attention to consumer demands, and that has to count for something.