Windows Vista Compatible?

By Asif Nawaz

With Windows Vista having been released over three months ago, many of us have had the chance to try and use the once long anticipated Windows Vista as a replacement for the largely successful Windows XP. I was largely impressed with the Microsoft Windows Vista Operating system, and as a Microsoft Partner, I was lucky enough to try out a Beta release before Vista hit the market in 2007. For the last three months, I have used Windows Vista as my primary operation system. I have been happy for the most part; but contrary to Microsoft claims, and those of its partners (such as HP and Dell), many products that are labeled as "Windows Vista Compatible," are in fact, not quite there yet.

The Apple Effect

One of the first impressions you get of Vista, especially with all the hype going on, is that maybe Microsoft has finally been able to match Macintosh Operating Systems (not like it was ever a competition for some Microsoft users). In particular, Vista seems to bear a striking resemblance to OS X on several grounds, although users of the Macintosh will differ from me for various sentimental reasons, the discussion of which I will not admit to this article. Not only is Vista similar in appearance to OS X, but in my first few days of usage, I realized that is also functions a lot like OS X, picking up some of Apple's most distracting features.

 One of the main highlights of the Macintosh OS X is the Operating System's undying ability to crash and ask for a reboot. You would think this is a good feature, but not being able to crash means the system slows down as you use the operating system, and eventually the OS freezes. That's a problem. I can't tell you how upset I've been with Steve Jobs for having that rotating cursor/icon flashing in my face while OS X tries to open a file that I know it's not going to. That typically won't stop you from using other programs, but since a certain amount of memory and processing power is dedicated to opening just this one program, it slows down all the other processes on the computer. Windows Vista functions very similar to OS X in this matter and it can be extremely taxing when you have two RAM intensive programs running at the same time. Windows XP would typically crash under this scenario, or give you an illegal operation type error to close one of the two. Windows Vista will stick to not responding, fade the window out, and allow you to use the rest of the PC as if nothing is wrong; except that you have fewer processing power and RAM for other applications. What's worst is that the End Task functionality doesn't work quite as efficiently as it does in Windows XP. With all the talk going on about how stable OS X is because it is UNIX based, Microsoft has made a very decent effort

to mimic the stability that users and customers have demanded. However, I'm not sure that's all good *unless* you have a computer that operates more than 2 GB of RAM. On a machine with that kind of leverage, a user can afford to dedicate 100 MB or RAM to figuring out the problem with a certain defective file or program. With 1 GB, you're going to be in trouble.

However, all is not bad. This is probably the only negative affiliation Windows Vista has with OS X. The look and feel is definitely clean, and the OS certainly competes with the cleanliness in appearance, quality, and feel of the Macintosh System.

Bottom Line: So what's the compatibility issue here? All HP and DELL machines that claim to be Vista Compatible are marginally so. Some features of the OS will not function on such computers; and even if the OS works on them, they will choke and give you several signs of incompatibility. You need *good* hardware to support Windows Vista. Apple usually provides the hardware *needed* for *good* functionality of the Macintosh Operating System. This is a problem most computer savvy users can fix, but that leaves out the mass market that Microsoft targets.

The Progress Bar

This is another rather frustrating fault in Windows Vista. The redesigned progress bar, which typically appears during installation and uploading/downloading, has become increasingly inaccurate. It doesn't take too long to figure this one out, but the bar is extremely 'flaky,' as in it refuses to move on several occasions, and jumps up rather inaccurately. Not only that, the installation or download time that Windows Vista displays alongside this bar is off, not just by 10%, but by more than 50% half the time! I'm not sure why that is, but it is certainly a problem that needs to be addressed.

Bottom Line: Most users like a progress bar that does just that (show progress). People would like to know how much download time something takes or how long a certain piece of data will take to move over. Windows XP wasn't bad with that. Windows Vista absolutely fails in this department.

Smart Phone Support?

Here's another arena where Windows Vista promised a lot, but upon release and use of the operation system, you see that the support for Smart Phones is virtually non-existent. Granted Windows Vista has a 'Mobile Phone Sync' feature for all phones that run on Windows Mobile, but did anyone at Microsoft stop to think exactly how many phones do run in Microsoft Windows Mobile? As of mid-2005, Microsoft only controlled 7.6% of the Smart Phone market, when Symbian dominated the market with a shopping 76% (Microsoft Expects to Dominate Smart Phones in three years). And here's where the problem arises, millions of users use Sony

Ericsson, Nokia, and Motorola Devices, and none of them have any support. I own a Sony Ericsson p990i, and although it's an excellent phone, my primary beef with it was my inability to have it sync with Windows Vista.

Sony Ericsson claims on their web site that they will have an updated version of their Smart Phone PC Suite available in the second quarter of 2007. So far, there's no support available for it. I'm not sure what the problem here is, but not having Smart Phone Support is very frustrating for a user that uses the Smart Phone as an *on the go* notebook computer.

Now I purchased my p990i recently, and before I purchased it, I made a serious effort to purchase a phone that supported the Windows Mobile Operation System, but I had no luck. There just aren't enough options in the international market with Windows Mobile Smart Phones. It's a different ball game in the US, but in Europe and South East Asia, Smart Phone options are restricted to the iMate or older Motorola models, all of which are highly overpriced or lack basic functionality for the international businessman. This may be one of Microsoft's schemes to dominate the smart phone market, but that doesn't change the fact that smart phone support and compatibility is poor.

Bottom Line: Windows Vista is not very Smart Phone Compatible. This needs to be resolved, and is one of the reasons I have switched back to Windows XP Professional.

Disk Defragmentation Fragged

Sometimes when your PC slows down, you can simply run disk defragmentation by right clicking on your hard disk partition to better organize the files on your hard disk drive, and that can substantially increase processing speed. Not anymore! With Windows Vista, the defragmentation feature has disappeared, at least on the surface. Unless you're a command line person and know a little about the inner workings of the operating system, defragmenting the hard drive can be a challenge.

However, all is not bad, explains Christopher Heng of howtohaven.com. Christopher explains that "there are a number of changes between Windows Vista's defragmenter and XP's defrag tool. In general, Vista's defragger is designed for the average user and is thus tuned for automatic behind-the-scenes work: by default, the defrag utility is scheduled to run weekly. It defragments all the partitions on all your hard disks automatically. Unlike the Windows XP defragmentation tool however, it will only defragment files with fragments smaller than 64 MB on NTFS file systems. The lack of any useful user interface in the Vista defrag utility is consistent with this design decision of having an automated defragger running behind the scenes without user intervention." (Heng) Chris goes on to suggest that this may actually be a good thing for the average user, who may not be too familiar with the process of defragmentation.

I don't agree with his opinion in that regard, but there are bigger things at play here. I used Windows Vista for three months, and when I looked at my hard drive with the defragmentation tool in Windows XP, about 80% of my hard disk drive was fragmented. That's how well Vistas automatic disk defragmentation works.

Nonetheless, Chris Heng has been kind of enough to share his expertise with the rest of us, and tells us how to defragment our hard drives in Windows Vista in the article posted on: http://www.howtohaven.com/system/vistadefragmentation.shtml.

Bottom Line: Vista's built-in defragmentation feature is inefficient, and no user-friendly or viable disk defragmentation tool is provided with the operating system.

The 'Replace with' Reversal

Have you ever changed an already existing file in a certain folder by dropping a newer version of the file into it? Windows will show a dialog box that will ask if you would like to replace that certain file with a certain size that already exists with the new one that you're dropping with the new size. This is useful, especially when the kind of work you do requires regular updating of certain content and you update the existing files on a daily basis.

Windows Vista makes a good addition to this. It gives you the option of renaming the file you drop into the folder (if another one with the same name already exists) by adding a suffix to it, so you can keep both versions. However, size of the new file and the existing file on the dialog box ix incorrect. The two sizes are reversed. So if you're dropping a file named xtest.doc that's 45 KB in size into a folder that already contains a file named xtest.doc at 32 KB, the dialog box will show the following:

Replace:
Original file xtest.doc (45 KB) with xtest.doc (32KB).

Although Vista will replace the 32KB file with the 45KB file, it can be sometimes disturbing to see the incorrect information pop up, especially when you're uploading documents to a web server via FTP. This is not a major defect, but a simple bug. It's amazing how something this simple was overlooked.

Bottom Line: Such bugs should not exist in software available in the market for retail by someone who comes with a reputation like Microsoft. It shows that maybe the product was not tested as it needed to be.

So what is Windows Vista Compatible?

What I've outlined above are just some of the issues that spit out into your face when you use Windows Vista. They're not all bad, but the point here is to not say that Vista is bad operating system. It is, by all means, a wonderful piece of software, but it still needs to become a mature Operating System before it will fully convince the Windows XP user to move over.

Upon switching back to XP, my first impression was "wow, XP is fast." It is, but it's nowhere as snazzy as Vista. At this point, Vista is recommended for anyone who has a powerful machine that is not just Vista capable, but runs it comfortably. However, I recommend it only as a second machine, until Vista becomes mature enough to provide support for some other software and removes some of the basic bugs.

In essence, there is a lot of software out there that is compatible with Vista. As a financial accounting Consultant, I can tell you that almost every major accounting software manufacturer has released a new patch or new version of the software that is compatible with Windows Vista. It may be expensive, but the new software is available in the market. Upon the release of a Service Pack 1, however, I think Windows Vista will become a robust operating system, especially when with time the minimum available configuration of hardware available in the market will be, at worst, Windows Vista Compatible and Capable.

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Works Cited

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