

Mike Nelson – SED article, due July 30, 2010

Five Things that I.T. Loves to Hate with Windows 7

Let's all admit it – Windows 7 is great, isn't it? Well, most of my I.T. colleagues aren't exactly singing the Win7 kumbaya sing-along when it comes to some features of this OS that make our jobs dealing with users harder. By incorporating features that might make Joe User's life easier, it makes some of us wishing that Microsoft would actually come and walk a mile of sneakernet in my shoes for one day.

Don't get me completely wrong. I do think that Windows 7 has a lot of great capabilities and additions that do, in fact, make our lives in I.T. easier. But here is my take on five things that I.T. Loves to Hate with Windows 7 (drum roll please...):

Direct Access – Most I.T. shops have a pretty diverse group of users, including those that are just a bit too techno-savvy for their own good. One of the features of Windows 7 and Server 2008R2 is Direct Access, which allows for the creation of a IPsec tunnel to connect a Windows 7 machine to another infrastructure from anywhere on the Internet. Now, while this is a great feature that could eliminate VPN's, this can be a nightmare for I.T. support when that one Joe User decides to setup his home network to support such connections from his laptop. Security concerns are in the forefront of this one, along with the opportunity for Joe to start opening up more networks that could cross between his home connected corporate laptop and your enterprise network. Unless I.T. has the safeguards in place with firewall rules and policies, this could become a real issue, real fast.

Aero (Peek, Shake, Snap, and any other adjectives they are adding to it) – This one I've included primarily for the newer VDI environments out there and not necessarily for a physical laptop or desktop install. Joe User goes and buys a brand new shiny laptop online for his home. His first impression is "Wow, this is so much cooler than XP" (notice I don't mention Vista, the train wreck that everyone wishes never happened). He hasn't actually tried any applications yet, this is just his impression from the Eye Candy interface called Aero. Now, Joe's company says that all users are moving to Virtual Desktops, and that the standard desktop image will be Windows 7. Joe gets his shiny new virtual desktop and his first thoughts are "Wow, this is not as cool as my new home laptop. What's the deal I.T.? I want my coolness back!" VDI performance and Aero do not mix well together at all. Eye Candy or performance? You choose., and then let Joe know.

No Upgrade from XP – A somewhat subtle point I made in the previous section about the Vista OS was that Vista kinda, well, sucked, to get right to the point, especially for I.T. So, since Vista rollouts were few and far between, most users will need to upgrade their existing XP machines to Windows 7. Now, while a clean install is always the best way to go, are you going to tell the CEO that he has to reinstall all his apps and re-customize everything? Maybe some of you I.T. folks can, but most of us can't get away with that. Microsoft, in its infinite wisdom, decides that

there will be no upgrade path from XP to 7. Now go tell your CEO, as we all know how much they like the word “no” from I.T.

XP Mode – I personally think that this is great feature, but I don’t want to support it. By allowing for an install of Microsoft’s VirtualPC product and an XP SP3 VHD image, Windows 7 has the ability to run those pesky legacy applications that the enterprise still has to run today, and probably tomorrow, next year, and so on. So, Joe launches his 16bit only expense reporting application, that his company decided a couple of years ago to not to buy upgrades or support for any longer, from his Win7 desktop. He really has no idea that it’s an XP virtual machine running the application. But, in the dark hollows, I.T. folks are cringing. While some of us are still trying to figure out how to completely manage patching and updating a single OS on a machine, now you go and throw in another one (and don’t forget the VirtualPC application running the whole show) to make our lives even more difficult. Great feature, but now double, even triple, the work for I.T. Like we really need more of that work?

Credential Manager – Ok, so someone at Microsoft decides “Hey, we still don’t have enough places in our OS that attackers can target, let’s add another!” I sure would like to meet that person and have them deal with Patch Tuesday at my company. So, they go ahead and create the Credential Manager, which is a just an updated Stored User Names and Password feature from the XP days. It is really just an encrypted storage shed for your users’ to utilize a simple form of Single Sign On, holding their usernames and passwords in the Windows Vault. So, let’s have my users put all of their private logon information in a central Vault database on their local machine, which could be lost or stolen at any given time. Great idea? It’s not even a good one for home users let alone corporate ones. How long do you think it will take for someone to crack that encryption, if they haven’t already? How long before an attacker is able to get that information from Joe User’s machine, and see, for example, that he is required to use his Social Security number to log into his home banking account? Oh, what, you didn’t think that Joe would just use that Credential Store just for company logins, did you? Now you’re thinking like Microsoft.