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Building The Business Case For Windows Vista

Five Reasons To Start Your Company's Migration Soon

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Worldwide, businesses' reactions to Windows Vista have been mixed. Most companies are well under way with their software and hardware compatibility testing and are planning to start their deployment toward the end of this year and into 2009. Others have had to prioritize major infrastructure projects beyond the client and aren't yet convinced that Windows Vista lies in their future. In fact, Forrester has spoken with dozens of companies that are internally debating the possibility of skipping Windows Vista entirely and going straight to the next release, known as "Windows 7." Although we applaud companies for thinking ahead, there are some harsh realities for those considering skipping Windows Vista. As a result, we're recommending that most clients start the migration to Windows Vista sooner rather than later to avoid potential pitfalls.

SETTLING THE DEBATE OVER WINDOWS XP, WINDOWS VISTA, AND WINDOWS 7

Windows Vista is more than a year old, yet companies worldwide still struggle with if and how it fits into their client environment.¹ Desktop operations professionals tell Forrester that they see the value in standardizing on Windows Vista, but many are having a hard time convincing their CIOs that the move isn't a risky bet, given the mixed reaction it's received in the press and the speculation surrounding what to expect after Windows Vista. As businesses of all regions, sizes, and industries struggle with how to settle this debate, Forrester sees five business reasons for your company to start its migration to Windows Vista soon.

- **For large businesses, there's no viable alternative.** According to our latest hardware survey, Microsoft operating systems are powering 99% of North American and European enterprise PCs and 97% of small to medium-size business (SMB) PCs.² Adoption for Windows Vista has been slow, but now that Service Pack 1 is available, we're starting to see businesses get serious about deploying Windows Vista companywide. Still, most firms will opt for a gradual upgrade to sync with the natural PC refresh cycle of the business. What about Linux or Mac OS X? These operating systems have certainly found their way into niche environments within businesses and select industries: Apple shows up frequently in marketing and scientific research departments and in the healthcare and retail segments; Novell, Red Hat, and even Ubuntu are used in financial services firms and government agencies. But switching over thousands of users at a time from Windows to one of these alternative platforms is simply not a viable option.
- **Businesses need to stay current with Microsoft and ISV support.** When selecting the platform of the future, there are six key dates that desktop operations professionals need to keep in mind:

1) Windows 2000 entered the extended support phase on June 30, 2005; 2) Microsoft will stop pushing out security patches on July 13, 2010; 3) Windows XP will enter its extended support phase on April 14, 2009; 4) security patches will end on April 8, 2014; 5) Windows Vista was released to the general public on January 30, 2007; and 6) Microsoft has pledged that Windows 7 will arrive “approximately three years after the release of Windows Vista” (i.e., in early 2010).³ What do these dates mean? Businesses can't support an operating system that is no longer secure, users don't want to run a stale platform on their work computer, and — most importantly — independent software vendors stop support for applications outside of Microsoft's support life cycle. We're finding that businesses that have flirted with the idea of skipping Windows Vista altogether and going straight to Windows 7 as soon as it becomes available almost always realize the pitfalls of this scenario and circle back around with us to discuss their Windows Vista deployment plans.

- **There's a lot of uncertainty around Windows XP availability after June.** Microsoft had originally planned to retire Windows XP on January 30, 2008. Due to overwhelming feedback that this date was just too soon, in September 2007 Microsoft announced that it will allow large PC manufacturers to extend the availability of Windows XP for another five months to June 30, 2008.⁴ There are concerns about the availability of Windows XP from tier one suppliers like Dell, HP, and Lenovo after this date. Because they're not ready to make the migration for various hardware or software compatibility reasons, many businesses are buying Windows Vista machines today and downgrading them to Windows XP. To upgrade these machines back to Windows Vista after June 30 without buying a new Windows Vista license, these businesses will have to buy licenses for either Windows Vista Ultimate or Windows Vista Business. So, will Microsoft extend the retirement date even further? We suspect not, and we've been urging clients to not assume that Microsoft will give in to customer and partner requests again. After all, by this time Windows Vista will be almost a-year-and-a-half old.
- **There's even more uncertainty around Windows 7.** To be blunt, customers know very little about Windows 7. Besides when it's slated to become available, they know that it's going to be a full release. Meaning? It's going to have a business version and a consumer version — and knowing Microsoft, multiple versions of each. It's also going to support both 32- and 64-bit computing. Beyond these tidbits, everything else is pure rumor and speculation. But it's important to keep in mind that Microsoft doesn't exactly have a clean track record for delivering products on time. It also tends to strip out promised features in order to hit deadlines (e.g., WinFS from Windows Vista). Ironically, one of Microsoft's biggest weaknesses — the unpredictable release schedule of its desktop operating systems — will likely spur adoption of Windows Vista as a result of this lack of faith in Microsoft delivering Windows 7 on time.
- **Windows Vista's feature/function improvements should make ongoing operations easier.** We're not going to run through the list of security, reliability, and user experience improvements that Windows Vista actually delivers on, but suffice it to say that the returns from early adopters

have been impressive.⁵ Customers have raved about being able to standardize their users on the standard user account thanks to its increased administrator privileges, having tighter control over what software users are allowed to install through User Account Control, and enabling users to find their much-needed documents through Windows Vista's integrated search function. And IT ops appreciates these improvements because Windows Vista environments should be easier to manage over time — resulting in fewer help desk calls — and because the experience changes from Windows 2000 or Windows XP are relatively minor and pale in comparison to that of the shift to Office 2007.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOCUS ON YOUR PEOPLE, PROCESS, AND TECHNOLOGY OF CLIENT MANAGEMENT

Over the course of a PC's life, there are many levers that IT ops can pull to lower its total cost of ownership. Possibilities include, but are not limited to: 1) leveraging a client management suite to help automate manual tasks like copying users' files and settings, migrating operating systems, or pushing out software updates; 2) transitioning from the forklift approach to a more predictable, cascading refresh cycle that's easier for your team to manage; or 3) reassigning staff from desktop ops to data center ops because you're deploying client virtualization technologies to help streamline management and tighten security. There are almost limitless client management improvements IT ops can implement that span people, process, and technology — and they're not mutually exclusive. Your company's next operating system migration is the perfect time to test out the client management improvements you've implemented during the downtime and to determine what's working and what's not.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Nearly half of the enterprises we surveyed have concrete plans to deploy Windows Vista. By the end of this year, 7% of enterprises will start their deployments. By the end of 2008, 32% will begin, and an additional 17% will start to deploy the OS in 2009 or beyond. But it's not a huge surprise that just over half the enterprises we surveyed don't yet have Windows Vista deployment plans. Others are simply taking a wait-and-see approach. See the November 12, 2007, "[How Windows Vista Will Shake Up The State Of The Enterprise Operating System](#)" report.
- ² Source: Enterprise And SMB Hardware Survey, North America And Europe, Q3 2007.
- ³ Because Microsoft reserves the right to change product life-cycle dates, Forrester recommends that our readers confirm key dates against Microsoft's online product life-cycle support Web site. Source: Product Support Lifecycle (<http://support.microsoft.com/select/?target=lifecycle>).
- ⁴ In an effort to respond to feedback the company is hearing from its customers and partners, Microsoft is extending availability of Windows XP editions among original equipment manufacturers (OEM) and retail channels for an additional five months to June 30, 2008. Source: "Microsoft Extends Sales Availability

of Windows XP,” Microsoft press release, September 27, 2007 (<http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/features/2007/sep07/09-27xpsalescycle.mspx>).

- ⁵ As Forrester conducted our 45 expert user interviews with IT operations professionals, three drivers were cited by the majority of those interviewed as key reasons to move to Windows Vista. More specifically, with Windows Vista, they were looking forward to: 1) improved security with User Account Control and BitLocker Drive Encryption; 2) more reliability, thanks to the longer development life cycle and more ISV cooperation; and 3) better performance with Aero, ReadyBoost, ReadyDrive, and SuperFetch. See the August 9, 2007, “Things To Consider When Preparing For Windows Vista” report.