ROLLING REVIEW

Ready To Roll Out Windows 7?

We review six deployment packages to see how they handle the new OS

The conventional wisdom is to never deploy a new operating system before the first service pack. But that thinking might be misguided with Windows 7, which is scheduled for release on Oct. 22.

First, Windows 7 shares much of Vista's core code base, and that code has been improved and enhanced during Vista's troubled tenure. This means the new OS will look and feel more like what Vista *should* have been from the get-go. Second, Microsoft is combating the "wait until SP1" notion by maintaining its position in regard to Windows XP, which has passed from mainstream support to the purgatory of extended support. What does that mean? You'll only get critical security-related updates for XP.

Your first thought might be, "So what?" And depending on the complexity of your environment and the resources available, that may be an appropriate response. Deferring an upgrade for as long as possible will save cash in the short term and make your Windows XP ROI numbers look great. Companies with a significant number of Vista systems have a complicated decision process as well.

But consider the pitfalls of waiting. For Vista systems, the next service pack will largely dictate strategy. But how much driver support will you get on XP for new hardware devices, particularly as PC refresh cycles bring new machines into the organization? Then there's application support. Eventually, developers will stop ensuring the newest Web and on-premises apps work with XP.

Our take is that, for most IT shops, now is the time to plan XP's funeral. To that end, we're launching a Rolling Review of Windows 7 deployment and management software. We've built a lab with a wide variety of client machines distributed across four sites, all connected by MPLS T1 links. All back-end servers and systems will reside on the corporate network at the hub, with clients evenly distributed among spoke sites connected across a WAN.

Our review will focus on a standard OS deployment, meaning we won't look at rolling out Windows 7 in a virtual desktop environment.

The goal of this Rolling Review is simple: Simulate how easy, or painful, it will be to upgrade client systems to Windows 7 in a distributed environment. Each deployment software product will handle a multitude of deployment scenarios, including the ability to preserve existing user profiles as efficiently as possible and

IMPACT ASSESSMENT WINDOWS 7 DEPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT SUITES

	● BENEFIT	● RISK
IT organization	●●●●○ | Trying to deploy any new OS on a large—or even medium—scale without the proper tools is asking for trouble. A capable client management suite is a must for IT groups embarking on the Win 7 journey.	●●●○○ | A comprehensive client management system requires resources to purchase and operate. However, it's a far bigger risk to undertake a move from XP to Win 7 *without* one.
Business organization	●●●●○ | A client management suite provides a solid foundation for remote support, software distribution, and asset management. As a result, client downtime is minimized and applications/updates can be delivered quickly.	●●●○○ | IT must evaluate a range of factors before purchasing, such as driver support, application compatibility, and hardware/staff resources. The market is more complex than when XP rolled out.
Business competitivenes	●●●○○ | Deployment tools will help IT deliver the business benefits of Windows 7 to employees faster and reduce downtime during the switchover.	●●○○○ | The biggest risk to competitiveness is the possibility of a botched or mismanaged Win 7 deployment.
Bottom line	●●●●○ ●●●○○ The right tool will ease the pain of an OS deployment and make long-term management of Windows 7 more efficient. The wrong tool will divert precious resources, so choose wisely.	

retrofit them to a Windows 7 master image. We'll test the range of features offered for packaging and deploying Window 7 itself. We'll look at post-installation client management features, remote administration, reporting, deployment of the management system itself, and, of course, pricing. We've invited a diverse slate of vendors, both leaders and emerging players:

Acronis

Though Acronis' deployment tool is designed only for enterprise imaging, migration, and bare-metal restoration, without additional client management features, that's all some organizations will need for their Windows 7 upgrades. We'll test how the product's deployment capabilities stack up against more full-featured rivals.

Avocent LANDesk

As with most vendors in our Rolling Review, LANDesk offers a software suite that accounts for the entire systems management life cycle, including OS imaging and migration, software distribution, remote management, software licensing compliance, and reporting.

Kace KBOX

Founded in 2003, Kace is an innovator in the client management market and is emerging as a real competitor to established players. The company offers both low-end and high-end KBOX appliances. We'll test the high-end version, which includes inventory, control, software distribution, reporting, OS imaging and deployment, user state migration, and system recovery.

Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager

Our review wouldn't be complete without Microsoft's own System Center Configuration Manager. In our review of SCCM, we'll also touch briefly on the Windows Deployment Toolkit, a free set of utilities for migration and upgrades that comes with Windows 7.

Novell ZenWorks

Novell has developed one of the most robust and heterogeneous offerings of any vendor. On the client management side, ZenWorks is compatible with an array of Windows operating systems, from Windows 2000 on up. ZenWorks lately has lost some market share to LANDesk and Altiris, but Novell is still an active player.

Symantec Altiris

Acquired by Symantec in 2007, Altiris is broken up into several product lines. We plan to test the Client Management Suite and the Deployment Suite. If we find a strategic and important feature contained within another suite, we'll test it as needed.

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Rolling Review [WINDOWS 7 DEPLOYMENT

The invitation
We're reviewing client management software packages to discover how they handle a Windows 7 upgrade.

The vendors
Novell ZenWorks, Symantec Altiris, Avocent LANDesk, Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager, Kace KBOX, Acronis

The test bed
Our lab simulates a business comprising four geographically distributed sites. We'll deploy Win 7 over the LAN, the WAN, and via removable media. We'll test how well user apps and data transition to Windows 7, and what the admin experience is like. We'll also uncover how well each suite can manage the client desktop environment, including remote management, reporting, and software distribution.

Microsoft And Others Take Aim At Adobe's Flash

Adobe's Flash technology has long played a major role in delivering compelling graphics online, but a shadow now hangs over its future as powerful technology companies—Apple, Google, and Microsoft—and open source organizations like Mozilla work to make Flash unnecessary.

At least, that's the way some view the situation, although as one might expect, Adobe sees things differently.

In the case of Microsoft, it's a matter of wanting to see its own technology and tools, from Silverlight to Expression, gain market share. Toward that end, and to blunt the adoption of open source development tools, Microsoft recently launched WebsiteSpark, a program that offers Web developers free Microsoft development software for three years.

Microsoft also has committed to participating more actively in the HTML 5 standards debate. HTML 5 includes tags that let Web sites present audio, video, and rich graphics without a plug-in technology like Flash.

Meanwhile, Apple—which competes against Adobe with a number of its professional media applications—has stymied Adobe's mobile ambitions by refusing to allow Flash on the iPhone. Although Adobe's CEO has confirmed that his company is working to develop a version of Flash that meets Apple's restrictions on interpreted code and API access, Flash's