

Top 8 Strategic Points When Weighing Win 7 Adoption

Windows 7 comes at an interesting time. The very notion of the desktop is being challenged by everything from virtual desktops and cloud options to netbooks and iPhones. None of these changes will come to the enterprise overnight, but all will influence the configuration of your end-user environment over the next three years. It's in this light that we take a look at eight elements of Windows 7 that enterprises need to factor into their plans for rolling out Microsoft's latest operating system.

1. Remote users will love Win 7

As more employees work outside the office, IT needs new strategies to keep them supported, secure, and productive. Two key features of Windows 7, BranchCache and DirectAccess, are excellent starting points for the next generation of improved mobile access.

DirectAccess leverages IPv6 and IPsec into a system that provides secure connectivity back to the main network, regardless of where users are connected—or even whether they're logged in at all. BranchCache also helps users at remote offices stay productive because the network can be configured to cache Web pages and files on local servers or in a round-robin peer style for sites without local servers, ensuring that frequently accessed data and files will be served up quickly to end users.

One sticking point: Both features require Windows Server 2008 R2.

2. Infosec teams will like Win 7

There's a lot of good news on the security front with Windows 7. Most of the improvements are a continuation of initiatives that started with Vista, including Microsoft's Secure Develop-

ment Lifecycle, which the company hopes will reduce exploitable code flaws in its software. Windows 7 is one of the first products to come through the full development life cycle.

At the same time, more thought was put into reducing the impact that intrusive security can have on the user experience. The company has retained the concept of User Account Control

At A Glance [HOT FEATURES OF WINDOWS 7

> **AppLocker:** Stops users from running unauthorized apps on their PCs—finally

> **BranchCache:** Caches Web and file shares for remote users to speed performance

> **DirectAccess:** Gives remote users a secure connection to the corporate network, but Win Server 2008 R2's a must

> **XP Mode:** A virtualized instance of Win XP that can run right alongside Win 7

but reduced the number of pop-ups that frustrated Vista users.

Other features, such as BitLocker, are updated, including the ability to encrypt removable devices. There are new security features, too, including AppLocker, which lets administrators prevent users from downloading and running unauthorized software.

3. It has better management

While BitLocker and AppLocker don't need Windows Server 2008 R2 to function, they *do* need Advance Group Policy Management 4.0. In fact, there are more than 350 new control options, many of which boost desktop control, power management, and the ability to use different functions based on ma-

chine location. However, you'll only get the full functionality for AGPM 4.0 with Windows Server 2008 R2.

Are you sensing a theme here?

4. It's netbook-friendly

A recent *InformationWeek Analytics* survey shows massive potential for netbook growth, from 35% in the enterprise today up to a projected 72% within two years. Smaller and less expensive than laptops, netbooks are perfect mobile devices for those on a budget. The bulk of netbooks in organizations today run XP Pro and Linux. Win 7 plays nicely on most netbooks, however, especially the pro version. That said, organizations should push for the enterprise version to get features like DirectAccess.

5. Desktop virtualization's coming

Less than 8% of organizations have actively moved any virtual desktops into production, according to another recent *InformationWeek Analytics* survey. Windows 7 will change that. The OS runs on all major virtualization platforms, including VMware, Citrix, and Microsoft. All vendors report a stable desktop. Unfortunately, display limitations and peripheral incompatibilities that have plagued terminal servers and thin clients for years remain.

The Windows 7 client has its own virtualization option, XP Mode, which lets you run XP as a virtual machine in Windows 7. It isn't suited to providing and managing virtual environments for the enterprise, but it will find use for one-off specialty apps or as a part of a test bed for development teams.

6. Windows 7 is SaaS-friendly

With more business apps moving online, Windows 7 offers an environment friendly to software as a service. It's tightly integrated with Internet Explorer 8, providing a stable platform for Web applications. And because IE8 is available for XP and Vista, enterprises can standardize on a single

browser. On the flip side, if you've settled on Firefox or Chrome, you'll need to watch their releases closely. Both have documented issues with Windows 7.

Longer term, the potential of Direct-Access as part of your broader public/private cloud design has real appeal. Microsoft has even hinted at providing Office 2010 options for both private and public clouds, giving IT extra flexibility when moving documents across systems.

7. The hype is your friend

Sure, the lovefest over Win 7 is a bit annoying, but you should be able to parlay that joy into end-user enthusiasm if you decide to deploy. Having users excited about a new OS goes a long way to aiding successful adoption.

Of course, hype can be a two-way street. At a recent *InformationWeek* Windows 7 virtual event, Steve Savage, CIO at CA, cautioned that users may jump the gun. He reminded IT about the need for testing, despite what users want. CA's own plan includes three full quarters of auditing and testing before the initial rollout.

8. You have a definitive timeline

Last, the clarity of Microsoft's release and support dates should be seen as a blessing for IT. Windows 7 is out and being deployed. XP mainstream support ended in April; Vista's will end in April 2012. Windows 7 will have mainstream support for five years, or two years after the release of the product's successor. Redmond waffled on XP a few times, mainly due to Vista delays,

but you can plan on these dates and adjust your strategy for phasing in the new OS and phasing out the old ones.

Whether you welcome Win 7 or curse the demise of XP, it's time to decide: Adopt Windows 7, move to Linux, or bring back the abacus. Your call. Vista lacked the features, stability, and market acceptance to drive forward the desktop. Windows 7 has addressed all of these issues.

In three years, the desktop as we know it today will look vastly different. Windows 7 gives organizations some breathing room to prepare for the coming wave of alternatives. That may be its nicest feature of all.

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