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I know what you are thinking... *“here we go again! Didn’t they just come out with Windows 7?!”* Technology changes at a whirlwind pace and Microsoft isn’t the exception, as a matter of fact, they are the ones that help set the precedence. From 2001 (when Window XP was launched) to the debut of Windows 8 in 2012, desktop users striving to stay current have had to learn 4 different operating systems. If that wasn’t bad enough, we have also gone through SOFTWARE changes. Since 1990, MS Office has gone through 14 versions, and the next one to come out, Office 13, will make the 15th version in 23 years. A quick math calculation will show you that roughly every 1.5 years a new software upgrade will be available on one of the most widely used programs in the world.

What does this mean to you? It means that if you want to stay current in your technology knowledge you have to be willing to learn. Flexibility is key as anyone that has jumped from Windows XP right into Windows 7 can attest. The operating systems don’t grow in a straight line, they change with whatever the populace makes popular. Current trends show us that mobility is “in” and tablets like iPads, Kindle Fire, Samsung Galaxy etc. are destined to be a staple in your technology retinue. Usher in Windows 8.

This past week I updated a laptop that had a Windows Vista OS (operating system) to Windows 8. While I always suggest to our members not to run out and buy the first version of a released software and OS’s until developers get a chance to fix any unexpected glitches, I felt I was savvy enough to figure it out, after all... it is my job. After hours of admitted frustration my impression is that I think I will be able to work with it, I may even grow to like it.

The issues I had with it were not just system quirks as some were self-created. For instance, my familiarity and comfort levels with XP, Vista and 7 did not prepare me for the completely different direction Windows went with in 8. The START menu is built to mimic what you might find on a tablet. You can customize it with the applications you use most as well as download “apps” like Facebook, Twitter, News, Calendars etc. Gone are the days of clicking on the START button (XP) or the WINDOWS button (Vista and 7) to open all the options your computer has to offer. Things like your CONTROL PANEL or program lists are hidden in a few layers of customizing that may take a bit to figure out on your own if you are not keen on using instructional resources first. A new slide out bar on the right hand side of the START screen (called a “CHARMS BAR”) hides the fine tuning options. It also hides the OFF button which is where I personally think the developers goofed. When you have to peruse through tutorials to figure out how to shut your computer off you might have made things a tad too complicated. Of course, to play the devils advocate, I would have to say that most tablets are meant to “hibernate” when you close the cover and getting around Windows 8 with a touch screen will be much simpler as it was built for that technology.

Even so, the fact that Windows XP will soon no longer be supported (what Microsoft refers to as END OF LIFE or EOL) will prompt many to either upgrade their operating systems to 8 or buy a brand new computer altogether with 8 already installed. I predict a huge learning curve for both options but an even greater one for those that upgrade their operating system themselves... WITHOUT having a touchscreen.

Upgrading to a new operating system can be an intimidating undertaking with the potential to massively disrupt your daily workflow before understanding kicks in. The dramatic interface changes introduced in Windows 8 needs to be considered as you may not want to invest in Microsoft’s latest OS without first giving it a thorough shakedown.

Fortunately, the solution is offered by Windows. Using a program called VirtualBox and the evaluation version of Windows 8 Enterprise, you can try out the new OS for free, without disturbing your current operating system. This option is not for the technically timid. If you are still interested in a virtual test drive please go to the following site for step by step instructions:

<http://www.pcworld.com/article/2016057/how-to-test-drive-windows-8-for-free-in-virtualbox.html>

Another option is to go to your nearest computer store and start playing with the models they have available. Either way, I strongly encourage you to do your research.

SOURCES: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Microsoft_Office



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