

# excelan : Windows 7 Heads Up

At Excelan, we believe that everyone should maximise their IT investment, that is why we have developed a series of relevant and useful emails to help you achieve this.

In this edition of our Free Tips email we would like to give you a heads up on the newest version of Windows.

Windows 7 has been unleashed on the market. So what's in it for you and why should you take it over good old Windows XP?

## So what flavours does Windows 7 come in?

**Home Basic Edition:** Will not be sold in Australia, so you can forget that it exists. Sorry I mentioned it.

**Home Premium Edition:** Intended for home use only. Limited ability to connect to other computers. Cannot connect to a corporate Windows domain.

**Professional Edition:** Suits most corporate environments. Can be connected to a Windows domain server and managed centrally.

**Ultimate Edition:** All of the features of Professional edition but with enhanced data encryption options (BitLocker) and can operate in multiple languages.

There is an **Enterprise Edition** which is about the same as Ultimate. This is only available through volume licensing agreements.

For more details on the different flavours you can check out this page : <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-AU/windows7/products/compare>

## Licensing and Upgrades

**License Downgrade Rights** – In the past it was possible to purchase a PC with an OEM license (i.e. supplied by the manufacturer) for Windows Vista and then legitimately downgrade this to Windows XP. With Windows 7 you have a similar right however you can only downgrade to Vista, not down to XP.

**But I just bought a PC with Vista!!** – If you have bought a PC with Vista between June 26<sup>th</sup> 2009 and January 31<sup>st</sup> 2010 you can upgrade for it to Windows 7 of the same flavour for the price of media shipment.

Follow this link for full details -

<http://www.microsoft.com/australia/windows/buy/offers/upgrade.aspx>

## Features and Performance

**Performance** – We loaded Windows 7 onto workstations that we had previously been using for Windows XP and Windows Vista. At the time we had loaded Windows Vista onto these workstations we needed to give them a memory boost (RAM) and so took them up to 2GB of RAM. Other than that these test workstations are not particularly special any more. They are tired old HP dx7200 and an even older HP d530s. They use Pentium 4 processors running at 3.0GHz and 2.8GHz respectively, both using Hyper Threading, which was a predecessor to dual core processing. Windows 7 is noticeably faster than Vista was on these workstations. This is especially so during start up, shut down, and resume from standby. On the whole Windows 7 seems a lot leaner and also uses services more efficiently by starting them only when needed. Background processes appear to be kept at a minimum.

**Hardware Platforms** – Windows 7 supports 32 & 64 bit editions out of the box with the exception of the Home Edition. This generally means that if you buy a higher end system with a 64bit processor your will get the benefits without having to buy a different edition of Windows. That said it is commonly found that 64bit systems do need some extra memory (RAM) as they use the memory in larger chunks.

**Desktop Experience** – Microsoft have designed the task bar so it appears semi transparent. This makes the screen look larger and more aesthetic without putting pressure on resources. This was the idea behind the Aero interface that came with Vista Ultimate. Its a lot quicker than navigating around in Vista and even works better than XP in our opinion. Larger Icons in the task bar has simplified the look, and one of our favourite features is the taskbar preview. Hovering your mouse pointer over a program on your taskbar you will get a small preview of each taskbar icon that is open. This cuts out the unnecessary switching between documents and emails that we are all used to when looking around for something already opened.

**Jump Lists** – If you right click on any program on the desktop or task bar you will get a list of the most recent items that have been used such as your most recent word documents, or spreadsheets etc.

**Quick Window arrangement** – This is a throwback to the 'Tile' feature that some of you may remember from Windows 3.1 (ok not all of you are that old). Essentially if you drag an application window to the side of the screen in snaps in to take up half of the visible area. Then drag another window to the other side of the screen and the same thing happens over there. You then have the two applications visible and can easily work on one while viewing another. This is good when you are copying fiddly bits of data from one application to another or comparing two sets of data. With XP and Vista you have to muck about with the size and placement of each window so this feature makes it quick and easy to set up.

**HomeGroup** – Easily create a home network and connect your PCs to a printer with a feature called HomeGroup. Windows 7 accommodates laptops that frequently move between home and corporate networks so that they can more easily participate and access resources on both networks.

**Windows XP Mode** – For applications that are not ready for Windows 7, the Professional and Ultimate editions allow you to run a virtual machine (machine in the machine) with Windows XP that then runs your application. This is called XP Mode and it allows organisations to transition quickly to Windows 7 without having to wait for incompatible applications to be redeveloped. Note that this does require the workstation to have a processor (CPU) that is capable of some tricks required for virtualisation. Microsoft have a utility available that allows you to test the workstation first.

**Desktop Search** – unlike the search feature in XP and previous versions of windows we have not noticed the indexing engine of Vista or Windows 7 using up lots of resources. The search feature is quite useful and can be used to quickly fire up applications and files that are otherwise buried away deep on the hard disk or hidden away in the start menus.

**Location awareness** – Professional and Ultimate editions can be configured to be location aware based upon the network to which they are attached. This allows default options to change automatically based on where you plug in the computer. If you take your laptop to another office it can automatically set a different default printer. This is great for companies that have many offices or are spread out across a few different sites. And it is not just good for laptops, IT administrators can use this feature to automate location based settings when they deploy a new workstation.

**Power Management** - For mobile computers Windows 7 is designed to improve battery life by adding power-saving enhancements, such as adaptive display brightness, which dims the display if you haven't used your PC for a while. It uses less power to play DVD's and uses processing power more efficiently.

**Ability to mount a Virtual Hard Drive (VHD)** – A Virtual Hard Drive is an image of a hard disk that has been packaged into a single file so that it can be stored elsewhere on another hard disk or other medium. With the right utilities this file can then be mounted to appear as though it is a working hard disk. One great feature of Windows 7 is the ability to mount these VHD files as a disk without the need for third party software. For example, if you still want to access your data on your old XP machine or for a backup of your old machine you can mount a virtual hard drive so it will appear as an attached hard disk drive. Given that newer hard disks are getting larger, this is great for archiving and accessing information from your old 2000/XP/Vista PC without the need to have an additional physical disk installed in your computer. Of course, you must first create a VHD of your old PC.

**Backup Utility** – All editions of Windows7 come with a backup application however the Home edition only allows you to back up to a USB disk or memory stick that is attached directly to the computer. The Professional and Ultimate editions allow you to select a location on the network as your backup destination.

**Removed Features** – Windows Photo Gallery and Windows Movie Maker are not included in the Windows 7 pack but can be downloaded for free from the Windows Live web site. Windows Mail has been dropped (it was the Vista version of Outlook Express) so you will need to source an email client such as Outlook or use a web based email such as Gmail or Hotmail.

**Issues** – You should investigate support for Antivirus as your vendors may not have a product available for Windows 7 quite yet. We have experienced some issues with Antivirus applications. So far Avast Antivirus seems to be the winner but the others will catch up fast I'm sure.

## Conclusion

As with most revisions of new operating systems, there is not a huge leap forward in end user productivity and indeed for those coming from XP a little time is needed to familiarise yourself with the new surroundings. However Windows 7 appears to be a solid platform that performs well on reasonably up to date hardware and builds on the manageability features of XP and Vista. Most of the new featured are buried deeper in the system and will be tapped into by developers and systems administrators.

There does not appear to be any reasons why it should not be adopted widely especially on new workstations and incorporated into businesses alongside Windows XP.

This free tip has been provided to you by  
Excelan. Feel free to pass it on.

If you need help and advice on getting Windows 7 up and going in your office and getting more from your IT systems then call Excelan on 02 8011 0281 or email us at [enquiries@excelan.com.au](mailto:enquiries@excelan.com.au)