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Virginia's Travel
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Professionals offer a local view

By Stephanie M. Mangino
The Winchester Star

Winchester — The Microsoft Windows Vista operating system released to home consumers today will look different from and be more secure than any previous Windows incarnation, according to local information technology professionals.




However, that doesn't mean that every Windows user should rush to upgrade or buy a new computer just to experience the new system.

The first question home and business customers need to answer before upgrading to Vista is this: "Is your hardware up to [specifications]?" said Rafael Caballero, owner of Information Network Associates in Stephens City. The firm is a Microsoft Registered Partner.

The new system does require a good deal of horsepower, said Don Louque III, vice president of sales and marketing for Winchester-based Global Technology Services, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner.

"The big thing is the amount of [random access memory] that your computer has," he said. For Windows Vista Home Basic, 512 megabytes of RAM is recommended, while Vista's Home Premium, Business, and Ultimate versions need at least 1 gigabyte of RAM,



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according to information provided by Louque in a Monday e-mail.

That, along with processor speed and available hard drive space, should inform any decisions about upgrading for home and business consumers, he said.

Although Vista has been available to business since late 2006, Louque said GTS's business customers have not started using it. Instead, the company has chosen to wait until today's main launch to really start talking about the system's use, mainly because of issues of software compatibility with the system.

Larger companies, such as Cisco, have patches available for their products, but some smaller firms are still working out their upgrades, he said.

Overall, businesses are progressing carefully, and Caballero has recommended that businesses undertake a six-month review before upgrading, to ensure they have adequate support (some information technology professionals still must be trained on the system), the right hardware, and software that can be used with the new operating system.

Louque said GTS is working with its customers and will make recommendations on a case-by-case basis.

Caution isn't a bad idea, added Sean Walsh, owner of Winchester-based Home I.T. Solutions. His firm, which offers support for Windows personal computers, is also part of the Apple Consultants Network.

"If you're stable now, I would wait a little while and let the bugs get worked out," he advised personal and business users.

But for a startup company seeking to begin its operations with a fresh system, Caballero said he would recommend Vista immediately.

Those who do switch to Vista will probably be happy with what they see, according to Louque and Caballero.

Home users, in particular, will like features such as Windows Defender, which combats unwanted e-mails (spam) and e-mails attempting to obtain private data through fraud (phishing), both said. It will take the place of third-party software that had to be purchased



as a supplement, Louque said.

It also has removal tools for spyware (software that collects personal information without the computer user's consent) and malware (malicious software designed to infiltrate or damage a computer system), he said.

Vista is very good about warning users that they may be ready to take an action that could have a negative effect on the system, Louque said.

Walsh hopes the system will solve the security problems Windows has had, but he also knows hackers will try to exploit any weaknesses in the system.

So while he will use Vista so he can provide technical support — the other companies will, as well — Walsh wants to monitor the system to make certain it is secure. "I want to see it to believe it."

Vista also includes performance self-tuning and built-in diagnostics, which will allow home users to see anything that may be slowing their computers and then to initiate repairs for the problems, Louque said.

The computer is constantly monitoring itself, he said. "It's looking for that weak link in the chain."

Information searches will change, too: users can type in a phrase and receive everything on the system connected to the topic. For example, Louque said, the word "baseball" could be entered, and an Excel spreadsheet with a roster could appear, as could photos of a child's baseball game, and appropriate videos.

The whole setup is intuitive, and is, admittedly, more "Mac-like," Louque said, referring to Microsoft competitor Apple Inc. Macintosh computers tend to be intuitive to use, and in general, computers are heading in that direction, he said.

"There are some similarities," Walsh said of what he has seen of Vista and Apple's Mac computers. But ultimately, all operating systems are trying to do the same thing — allow people to see everything they're doing at once, from browsing the Web, to e-mailing, to working on a project.

While Vista may look somewhat different to longtime



Windows users, it will be easy to learn because of its intuitive nature, said Louque, who likened it to becoming familiar with the locations of necessary devices in a new car.

And even though the screen might have some similarities to the Mac, “it’s still Microsoft underneath the hood,” said Caballero, who called the new interface “very clean.”

Even with all the publicity surrounding today’s release, Louque said Microsoft is expecting an 18-month adoption period for the system.

Some instant adopters will “test-drive” the system, he said, and then others will follow.

As that time passes, the local IT professionals will be watching. “It’s going to be interesting — that’s for sure,” Walsh said.

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