

Windows Vista is finally here... but XP's not dead yet

The release of [Windows Vista](#) is a fantastic achievement but Microsoft should not lose sight of the fact that many of their customers will be running Windows XP for a while yet.

Why is that? Surely, everyone will want to upgrade to the latest operating system platform, the one which offers the greatest functionality? Well, yes, but it's difficult to justify a pretty user interface to a CIO and although Windows Vista has many significant improvements under the covers, much of the marketing I've seen from Redmond (via Reading) has been about how the new operating system is "clear, confident and connected".

I'm not suggesting that organisations stick with Windows XP for an extended period but it seems likely to me that the majority of Vista's early adopters will be consumers and small-medium enterprises (SMEs). Meanwhile, many corporates will receive Vista on new hardware but downgrade to standard desktop environments based on earlier versions of Windows and, once they do start to upgrade, I believe it will mainly be those who are running Windows 2000 that move first. On that basis, Windows XP will remain in mainstream use for quite some time, regardless of Microsoft's [support lifecycle policy](#) (especially with Gartner advising companies to wait until 2008 before deploying Vista – and even then using a strategy of "managed diversity").

Microsoft's [Windows server product roadmap](#) indicates a major release every four years with an update release at the mid-point. I'd like to see something similar for client releases, with a service pack (SP) every 12 months (which should consist of bug fixes only – any new functionality should be in a separate feature pack, for optional upgrade). Based on the release dates for XP SP1 and SP2, we should have seen SP3 already and shortly be looking at SP4; however Microsoft's [Windows service pack roadmap](#) indicates that the next Windows XP service pack won't be ready until 2008! Why so long? After all, Windows Server 2003 SP2 is scheduled for spring 2007 and Windows Vista SP1 is expected to coincide with the release of the next Windows Server product (including, for the first time, kernel updates in a service pack).

Of course, even Microsoft doesn't have infinite resources and the Windows product group has been very busy with Windows Vista, Windows Server codenamed Longhorn and Windows Server 2003 SP2. Maybe delaying XP SP3 is Microsoft's way of gently nudging us all towards Vista – after all they don't want a repeat of the scenario where, [in summer 2005, there were still more organisations using Windows 2000 than had upgraded to XP](#) (3 and a half years after XP's release).

In time, Windows Vista will become the operating system of choice but until that happens, those of us using XP will still need to download, assess and test individual updates every "patch Tuesday", whilst we wait for SP3.

Thank you Microsoft, for your valiant efforts to ship Windows Vista. It's been a long time coming and I should really be excited, but there will be many organisations running unsupported (or extended support) instances of Windows XP for a while yet. In the meantime, can we have another XP service pack please?

Mark Wilson, 21 November 2006.

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