

Microsoft Windows Vista Buyers Guide

By Tim Thibault, Realcomp Customer Care Representative (9.17.07)

Are you considering buying a new computer, or upgrading your computer to Microsoft Windows

Vista? If so, you may feel a bit daunted by the task ahead since there are so many different versions of Windows Vista. Hopefully, after reading this guide you'll feel more confident about which version to purchase.

Every version of Vista comes standard with Microsoft Internet Explorer 7, which is the latest version of the web browser required to use Realcomp *Online*[®].

There are three (3) major points to consider when purchasing a copy of Windows Vista:

- 1.) Which edition is right for you?
- 2.) Should you buy the Upgrade or Full Version?
- 3.) What are the benefits and drawbacks of 64 bit vs. 32 bit?

Which Edition is Right for You?

There are many different editions of Windows Vista. The only ones that should be considered are the five (5) editions sold in the United States. These are: Basic, Home Premium, Business, Enterprise and Ultimate. **If you are offered any edition of Windows Vista other than these five, do not buy it!** All others are intended for use outside of the United States and do not include many features.

The Basic Edition is exactly what the name implies. This version does not include most of the new features advertised for Windows Vista. It comes with the standard security features such as Windows Defender, Windows Firewall and the Network Sharing Center, but little else. Though this Operating System is more secure than Microsoft Windows XP, if you want more functionality, this would not be the version for you.

The Home Premium Edition is intended for home users. It includes all of the features available in the Basic Edition as well as the new Aero user interface, Mobility Center for Laptops

and Tablet PC's, Windows Meeting Space, Windows Slide Show, and Scheduled Backup.

The entertainment software however, is this edition's biggest selling point. This software includes Windows Media Center, Windows DVD Maker, the Premium Game Package, and Windows Movie Maker. The Home Premium edition is a good choice for a home PC or laptop, though the emphasis on entertainment and lack of business features can make it a poor choice for a business environment. On the other hand, it can be a more cost effective alternative if those features included in the business edition are not important to you.

The Business Edition is geared more towards small businesses. This edition features all of the Home Premium extras with the exception of the entertainment software. It also includes various tools that business owners may find useful such as Complete PC Backup & Restore, Windows Fax & Scan and Remote Desktop Connection.

The Enterprise Edition includes extra capabilities designed for larger businesses, as well as all of the features of the Business Edition. This edition of Windows Vista is not sold to the general public. It can be purchased directly from Microsoft in bulk licenses and is intended for large offices with more than one computer. The extra features included in this edition are Windows Bit Locker Drive Encryption, Application Virtualization, and Multi-Language Support.

The Vista Ultimate Edition is the solution for those who want it all. Though this edition does not have any unique features itself, it includes all of the features from every other edition. It is naturally the most expensive of all the editions.

For a detailed comparison chart showing the features of each Windows Vista edition and explanation of what these features do, visit the following webpage.

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/editions/choose.mspx>

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Should You Buy the Upgrade or Full Version?

Another choice to consider when purchasing Vista is to buy the Upgrade or Full Version. Most editions in the previous section are available in both versions.

The Upgrade Version is intended to upgrade a computer with Windows XP already installed. You cannot install this version without an existing copy of Windows XP installed on that computer. After you activate this version of Windows Vista, the CD key for Windows XP becomes invalid. This means that you can no longer install that version of Windows XP on any machine. I would only recommend this version if you plan to upgrade to Vista, and do not want to use your old copy of Windows XP on another machine. It is important to note that not all editions of Windows XP can be upgraded to all editions of Windows Vista. Windows XP Home can be upgraded to any edition of Vista. Windows XP Home Media Center Edition can only be upgraded to Vista Home Premium or Vista Ultimate. Finally, XP Professional can only be upgraded to Vista Business or Vista Ultimate.

The Full Version of Windows Vista is the most flexible, and also the most expensive. This version does not require that you have a copy of Windows XP on your computer before installing, although it will allow you to upgrade from XP to Vista. This version of Vista, if used to upgrade Windows XP, will not invalidate the CD key for XP. You can also reactivate this as many times as you need, and can install it on as many computers as you want, however only one computer may have it installed at a time.

There is a third version of Vista that is not intended for retail sale, but often times can be bought online or in smaller computer stores. This version is called OEM and it is intended for Original Equipment Manufacturers to be installed on new computers when they are built. **Microsoft does not offer support for this version.** I would strongly recommend that you avoid this version unless you are purchasing a new computer that comes bundled with Vista.

What Are the Benefits & Drawbacks of 64-Bit vs. 32-Bit?

Windows Vista also comes in the 64-bit and 32-bit versions. For people who have computers with 32-bit processors, the choice is easy; a 32-bit processor cannot run a 64-bit program. In general, the 64-bit version is faster and more secure than the 32-bit version, though there are no differences in functionality between them. Contact your computer manufacturer to find out which type of processor you have.

Unfortunately, at this time, there are some drawbacks to running the 64-bit version. Some devices you use in your computer such as your webcam, sound card, video card or printer might not work with this version of Windows. Check with the manufacturer of your devices before upgrading to be sure there are drivers available for the 64-bit version of Vista. Furthermore, the 64-bit version does not support old 16-bit software (DOS programs). Finally, although the 64-bit version of Vista can run 32-bit applications, you will not see any performance increase unless you are running a 64-bit version of that application. I would recommend that you install the 32-bit version of Windows Vista, unless you are certain that everything you have will work with the 64-bit version.

Windows Vista is the most stable and secure operating system Microsoft has built to date. Hopefully, this guide helps you feel more confident when the time comes to purchase the latest version of Windows. Speak with your computer technician or salesperson for more details about which is right for your specific needs.