

Report to: department
Thursday, 31 May 2007
Upgrading Windows XP Laptop to Windows Vista Business Edition.



Happy Laptops?

Background:

The department runs a network of seven servers: these run Microsoft Server 2000/2003 server software, Citrix Presentation and Blackberry BES software.

The department hosts the NWP which uses Citrix Presentation Server to attach to the network in Highcroft.

Both teams use computers with Microsoft Windows XP installed.

All but a very few of the computer have a minimum of 512 MB RAM installed. It is no longer possible to upgrade the Sonys and some of the older Acers with more RAM.

It is becoming more difficult to buy laptops without Microsoft Vista installed.

The purpose of this exercise was to see how well existing computers could be upgraded and whether Vista would work in the existing network environment.

Laptop specification:

The department decided to upgrade an Acer C200. This is a tablet laptop – which means you can access menus by tapping the screen with a stylus rather than dragging a mouse pointer. Having spent eight months or so grumbling about the lack of a touch mouse pad, [sarahNet Ltd](#) eventually found the stylus an invaluable way of using the computer and was now a fan. It was important that Microsoft Vista could supply drivers for the touch screen.

The laptop had 1GB of RAM with a 32bit Centrino chip running at 2 GHz. It had a 100GB drive partitioned C: and D: as is common in the Acer Laptops.

The laptop had a sound driver problem caused by a Windows security update. It had wiped out the realtek audio driver. The replacement driver caused serious sound distortion and the Windows Hot Fix had not fully resolved this.

The partitions were FAT formatted.

sarahNet Ltd stores all personal information on the D:\ in a folder called sarah's information. This is mapped to the *my documents* folder. Program files are stored on the C:\ automatically during the software installation process.

Microsoft Vista Business Edition:

Vista requires 1GB of RAM *min* and a 32bit chip with a least 1GHz processing speed. It requires a 40Gb min hard disk drive to install.

Preparation:

sarahNet Ltd spent some time checking the C200 would be compatible with Microsoft Vista.

The Acer website reported there were no compatibility problems with the C200 and an on line check with Microsoft reported no problems.

Backup: there were several backups taken of the laptop none the less.

Installation:

Microsoft Vista upgrade is supplied on four DVD disks.¹

Reaching bravely for the lucky heather, disk 1 is installed, boots up and starts checking the laptop for compatibility. Fifteen minutes later it reports the c:\ FAT partition should be in NTFS format. This elicits much irritation as no-where did the pre checks on the Microsoft site mention this. Acer for some reason this writer has never understood, has always supplied its laptops drives partitioned in the older FAT format; therefore all the DEPARTMENT laptops would need to repartition the C:\.

The upgrade has to be cancelled and the C:\ reformatted. This involves using the command prompt

convert c:/fs:ntfs

This command should not destroy any data on the C:\ . Nevertheless, watching the C200 screen plunge into darkness for twenty minutes with only a tiny green flicker from the hard disk light to indicate any activity at all, was not, to put it mildly, comfortable. Mentally it is possible to start shredding leaves off the lucky heather; it loves me, it loves me not. It loves me – the screen rebounds into life. Lovely Windows XP reappears. It is possible to start the upgrade process again.

¹It is interesting example of Microsoft inconsistency that the CDs are labelled Disk 1,2 etc but are referred to on the on screen instructions as Disc 1 etc. As an English Graduate I start to worry as to which is correct and why.

Once Microsoft pre-installation checks were happy it started the upgrade in earnest.

A stern warning then announced that the following software has *known compatibility problems*:

These were:

1. Citrix – worrying as this is such a core function of the DEPARTMENT network
2. Symantec – again a core application on the DEPARTMENT network
3. Adobe Acrobat 5

4. nVidia video drivers- very worrying for the C200 user as these drove the touch screen monitor.

In this instance [sarahNet Ltd](#) decided to continue with the upgrade and trust the Acer site which stated that the C200 was fully compatible with Vista.

The screen immediately went black and the rest of the installation was viewed using an external monitor.

The first message from the upgrade screen was a notice
Please stay at your computer until all discs have been read
The Vista upgrade can take several hours

At least in this instance Microsoft was precise: not including the partition change, the upgrade took around ***three and a half hours***.

Eventually it completed its third reboot and booted into Windows Vista: hurrah and *then* it had the temerity to announce that...

Time Is Precious

Windows Vista, it announced, would help you make good use of your valuable time.

It would try the patience of a saint.

Another ten minutes decided it was a valid installation and the new desktop was displayed.

Happily the laptop monitor showed itself and on picking up the stylus to poke Windows Vista rather hard, [sarahNet Ltd](#) was relieved to find the touch screen drivers were installed and working.

Microsoft Windows Vista:

The new Vista is an attractive interface for the user. However, questions remain: such as why?

Why put a watch face on the desktop when there is still a time display on the start bar?

Why have a bar on the right hand side with a tiny screen that rotates photos and pictures. It is not unattractive, but there is no real ability to look at these pictures as they continue their round. It seems a token display of sensibility – a display to our colleagues that we do indeed have friends, family and possibly a life away from the computer. But not important enough to stop the display and look our loved ones properly. Moving on, the first problem encountered was an inability to connect to the web browser. This frustration this caused was deepened as clearly at some level the computer was able to access the internet and install updates.

There proved to be an incompatibility with Comodo Firewall. Comodo is a fantastic and free firewall that has proved to be invaluable. [sarahNet Ltd](#) is confident that Comodo provides a secure environment when accessing the internet. The new Vista Windows Firewall does not work with it.

Unfortunately, switching off the Windows Firewall was not consistent as it switched itself back on at every reboot. Eventually Comodo Firewall had to be uninstalled. Is [sarahNet Ltd](#) confident running a Windows Security Product? No!- and is working to resolve this.

Symantec anti virus checker was disabled by Vista. It may be possible to reload the client from the disk, but this would need to be checked back in the office.

Citrix software and Acrobat Adobe 5:

When both these software packages were opened Vista complained that they were older version and threw up various warnings about compatibility issues.

However, if the user chooses the *continue* button both applications open and appear to work. Although the Citrix connection needs to be tested more thoroughly to ensure it can open all attachments and formats.

It is not difficult to upgrade Adobe Acrobat although the department should take advice from Citrix/Taran regarding latest drivers for Citrix/Vista.

Network and local drives:

Vista found all the network drives and connections without any problems. [sarahNet Ltd](#) found all its original folders on the D:\ although rather irritatingly, the folder *sarah's information* had been mapped to the *documents* folder and displayed as a folder called *documents* This is not a huge issue but is indicative how Vista puts an inconsistent conformity on its users.

Docking station and power:

Happily the upgrade did restore a good sound system to the C200. This was discovered when the laptop was used on battery. As the battery was about to run out, the laptop emitted a piercing scream that continued until the laptop shut down. This could be somewhat embarrassing on trains as concerned passengers may well enquire what exactly the user is doing to cause such pain. A more cynical observer may enquire whether the power would be better conserved in shutting down documents in a timely fashion.

Finally on a power note, the C200 uses the newer docking station and Windows Vista does not seem to recognise this as a power source. Therefore it is necessary to plug the power supply directly into the laptop. This should be checked with the slightly older docking stations in use with DEPARTMENT offices.

Performance:

Whilst the C200 had the minimum RAM recommended for Vista, it performed quite well when installed. However, even with the fast 2GHz chip there are times when it takes a few moments to respond to a command. Ideally this C200 should be upgraded to 2GB of RAM.

There seems to be no compatibility problems with Office 2003 and so far there have been no crashes or real usability issues. The look and feel of Vista is attractive, but [sarahNet Ltd](#) has not found any one utility that would make an upgrade imperative.

Conclusion:

sarahNet Ltd has had to investigate a Vista upgrade because new laptops arrive for the network with Vista pre-installed. The truth is, however, that Vista has not given a compelling reason to upgrade. Yes, Microsoft speaks of improved security, but no experienced IT professional will put faith in such claims. Unfortunately, Microsoft is not a one stop shop solution, despite its best endeavours to be so.

sarahNet Ltd believes in putting together a portfolio of applications to protect work on an operating system. There is a valid and lovely set of applications available to people via the internet at little or no cost. It is deeply frustrating to have to shut down Comodo software because Windows will not accept it as part of its defence systems. It seems as if Microsoft believes it has delivered a house that everyone should be at home in: hence the attention to graphics and photos. However, it is a fallacy to believe this software fits all, just as all houses differ in decoration and development.

All this method does is standardise security and thus make it easier for hackers to attack. If all the locks in every house in the block are the same, breaching that security is much easier.

The network that sarahNet Ltd is currently working on has recently upgraded its Symantec Corporate software to the latest version. It is astonishing therefore, that Vista does not recognise it. What has happened to the much vaunted partnership with Symantec? What happened to the idea of backward compatibility? Windows security systems do not make systems secure. It is difficult to understand why Vista is programmed to lock out a major program such as Symantec. Is Vista the way forward? Setting up this system took a day of my life and I am not sure what I have gained by the upgrade.

The amount of computers now shipping with Vista tends to ensure it will be the Operating System of inertia, if not of choice. Luckily there is now a choice to experienced computer users and you would be well advised to examine Apple or Open Source solutions. Never accept Vista by default.