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What About Vista? by Greg Thomas

The life cycles of Microsoft's operating systems for personal computers seem to run about two or three years between each new version. The last release, Windows XP, is an exception to this cadence. Introduced in October of 2001, XP has had a relatively long life while incorporating many substantial improvements along the way. Even those computer specialists who traditionally looked down on MS operating systems over the years agree that XP represents the first "good" Windows version to hit the shelf. The experts are happy with it, users have grown to like it, updates and patches for various issues are regularly offered on-line. So, why the big push to replace Windows XP?

Well, like so many things, the answer you get largely depends on whom you ask. Anyone involved with the computer industry can reflect back on previous operating system debuts and recognize the current blend of anticipation, apprehension and hyperbole as just a normal part of the pre-release process. Claims of greater capabilities and ever increasing hardware requirements have been a part of every new Windows version since 3.1. Another recognizable aspect of any new operating system is that of the "leading edge - bleeding edge" component.

It is a common economically driven practice in the computer industry to rush new products out the door. Microsoft is no different - the Windows operating system accounts for a major portion of their revenue. In these cases, the introduction of a new product is followed by rapid adjustments and revision. The truth is, a company expects "bug fixes" just after the release of any new product. We as consumers have learned this is an expected practice. It's simply part of the expense of being first to market, we get to help Microsoft sort out the bugs - and we pay for the privilege.

When Windows XP was first introduced, significant parts of the industry turned to the older Windows 2000 operating system while waiting for necessary revisions to XP. The new product was not at an acceptable level of completion for widespread enterprise distribution. Later, the introduction of "Service Pack 1" brought XP into the mainstream of acceptance.

Windows Vista, released on January 30th of this year, shows many new potential capabilities. Advancements in system security and multi-media performance are prominent among its advertised features. There is, however, a good deal of controversy related to hardware requirements for running Vista. Some would suggest that using Windows Vista will require a wholesale replacement of anything less than the latest in computer hardware. There were initially similar concerns surrounding the release of XP that ultimately were not so. At this point, we really may not know all that we don't know about Windows Vista. This is by no means an unprecedented position at this point in any new release introductory process. Looking back on previous Windows releases, we see that they invariably required a bit of post-release updates before finding full acceptance among industry professionals.

Perhaps a measure of patiently guarded optimism is again in order before embracing the leading edge.

Watch for more information on Windows Vista in next month's newsletter.

Centra Central

Feb. 16 - Online & Print Communication (Jennifer Jahedkar)

Feb. 23 - Copyright (Elizabeth Gregory)

Mar. 02 – Effectively Communicating as a Manager (Jennifer Humphries)

Enroll or browse upcoming events or learn more about Centra by clicking the Centra Symposium link from the EIT webpage or going directly to <http://eit.tamu.edu/centra.html>. Playback any of the 250+ recorded sessions from the Public Recordings link at <http://centra.tamu.edu/main/tce>. For more information, go to <http://eit.tamu.edu/Centra/frionline0607.pdf>.

Web Info – New Security Technique by Fred Rodriguez

My credit union recently upgraded their web security system to get around a very dangerous security vulnerability - keystroke loggers. Once installed, keystroke loggers record every keystroke that a user makes on the keyboard. Virus protection programs are of no use once the keystroke logger is already functioning. If the virus program can prevent the keystroke logger from being installed on your computer, then you are safe. However, no virus protection system is able to detect and quarantine all viruses; they can only stop viruses for which there are current definition files installed or viruses that work in a predictable way (this is why it is important to keep your anti-virus software updated with the latest virus definition files). Even worse, if someone has access to your computer system, they can replace your keyboard with an identical looking keyboard that could incorporate a hardware-based keystroke logger installed on it. In this case, no anti-virus or anti-spyware software can help. The good news is that most anti-spyware tools (e.g. Spybot, Ad-Aware, etc.) will detect and clean software-based keystroke loggers from a computer and most anti-virus software will block them from being installed.

Now that we know just what a keystroke logger does and why it is dangerous, let's look at this new security feature the credit union is using to help protect against keystroke loggers. Rather than typing in a password and /or account number, using the keyboard, a user "types" using their mouse. The system shows an image of a keyboard on the screen, and the individual uses the mouse to select keys by pointing and clicking on the image. Thus, the actual keyboard is not used to enter sensitive information. In the future, this form of security may start being used more often. While my credit union has not yet fully implemented this security measure, it likely will not be too long before it and other institutions do make use of it.

Besides, it never hurts to get a preview of new technology before it arrives.

Have a web tip you'd like share? Send it to ajhughson@ag.tamu.edu! Please be aware that if a tip doesn't make it in right away, we'll save it for future use.

Helpful Links

Possible URLs to link from your Websites this Month:

- **FCS** – Child Nutrition Centra Public Recordings – <http://centra.tamu.edu/main/tce>
- **AG and Natural Resource** – Natural Resources Conservation Service - http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/partners/for_farmers.html
- **4H** – Youth Noise - <http://www.youthnoise.com/>

Other useful links:

- **EIT Learning Resources:** <http://eit.tamu.edu/resources.html>
- **EIT Tech Ops Blog:** <http://tceblogs.tamu.edu/wtexas/>
- **Brazos Valley Adobe-Macromedia Users Group :** <http://bvamug.tamu.edu>
- **Brazos Valley Web Guild:** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bvweb/>

Tip of the Month: *Print Screen* – What does that key do? by Maryann Mooring

Do you think a “screen shot” is what happens when someone is really mad at their computer? Did you know that a “screen capture” is not some kind of kidnapping scheme? Do you have a tip for the TTnT newsletter and would like to put in an image to help explain it? Can’t quite figure out how to create those images like you see in the newsletter each month? Well, there’s a key on your keyboard that could be very helpful in getting that job done – the “Print Screen” key (Figure 1). Have you ever pressed this key and wondered what exactly it does? To put it simply – it takes a snapshot of whatever is on your computer monitor screen and places that image on the *clipboard*. These snapshots are often referred to as “screen shots” or “screen captures.” Once on the clipboard, that image is ready to paste into pretty much any application.

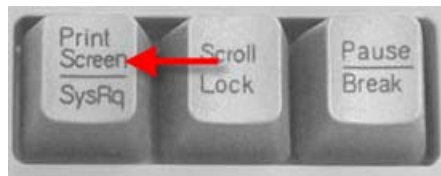


Figure 1

The Windows *clipboard* is a temporary storage space in memory where an item is placed when the “copy” or “cut” command is used. When you “paste,” the item is transferred to the active program. Usually, if you copy something else, the old item is replaced with the new (NOTE: MS Office XP, 2003 and newer allow for multiple items to be placed on the clipboard and allow access to “pick and choose” what is pasted).

Here’s How:

1. Ensure that the screen displays what you want captured completely on the screen (e.g. nothing is cut off)
2. Press the **Print Screen** key on your keyboard (Hold the **Alt** key down while pressing **Print Screen** to capture only the active window)
3. Open an image editing program (e.g. MS Paint, IrfanView, etc.)
4. Go to the menu bar and select **Edit – Paste**
5. Use your image editor's crop tool to crop out unwanted portions of the screen shot
6. Go to the menu bar and select **File - Save As**
7. Navigate to the folder where image will be saved
8. Type a file name for the image
9. Select a file type (GIF is usually the best option)
10. Click **Save**

Once you have edited and edited your image, you can then insert the saved file into an application such as WordPerfect or MS Word.

You can also paste directly to almost any application since the image is on the clipboard. MS Office applications have some image editing tools (crop, resize, etc.) built into the application. You may not have as many options as with photo editing programs, but for quick edits they work well enough.

Try it out today! Create a screenshot that shows the “My Schedule” page in Centra. After you have edited the image, insert it into a document (either MS Word or WordPerfect) and send your screenshots to ajhughson@ag.tamu.edu. First five will get a prize!