

## the newsletter of Tarragon Solutions

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### Solutions!

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## Windows 7 – still impressed!



Last month I gave my first impressions of the just-released Windows 7 Beta and they were, on the whole, favourable. Having had a chance to play and read up on other reviewers' comments, have my feelings changed? Nope.

The majority of this month's edition of **Solutions!** is dedicated to looking a bit more closely at the new operating system and picking out some of those features that should encourage you to make plans for the future.

The general consensus is that the Windows 7 Beta is remarkably stable; more stable than the Vista Service Pack 2 Beta, for instance. This bodes well for the future and demonstrates that Microsoft really is taking this seriously. Their decision to open up the Beta to all who wish to download and test it also shows a newly-found openness. We can hope this is a trend that continues!

Windows 7 may be installed over an existing copy of Vista or on an empty PC; with this release, at least, it is not possible to install over Windows XP. This may be a bit of a blessing as it's never a bad thing to install on a cleaned PC and, anyway, in this case it's much faster. Installing afresh took about 20 minutes; replacing a Vista installation may take several hours! I found no problems with hardware compatibility and other reviewers make the same claim – a refreshing change following the driver problems experienced at Vista's introduction.

The user interface will be quite familiar to a Vista user; less so to one familiar only with XP but nothing to cause problems. Microsoft has retained those features of the Vista interface that people liked and have tried to remove or remodel the parts that were less well accepted. However, an area that has changed significantly is the Task Bar. Instead of the long buttons containing a small icon and the name, Task Bar buttons are now larger, looking more like those in the Office 2007 Ribbon, and contain just the icon of the application – or applications if multiple copies of the same program are running. Hover your mouse over a button and a list of all instances is displayed, just select (or close) the one you want. Right-click on the button and you'll see the new "jumplists" – a handy list of shortcuts including items such as recently used documents for that application.

We're all familiar with the "clear desktop" icon that appears in the "Quick Launch" area at the bottom left of the screen in XP and Vista; clicking it minimizes all open windows. In Windows 7, the button has moved to the bottom right of the screen and is a permanent 'block' rather than a button. Click once to clear the desktop (except for any open gadgets\*), click it again to restore all the windows.

Even handier is the introduction of the "shake'n'vac" mouse gesture; click onto the title bar of a window and shake the mouse from side to side – all the other windows will minimize. Repeat the gesture and those windows will be restored!

continued over....

\*For non-Vista users, *gadgets* are small but useful applets (clock, calendar, news feeds, currency converter, etc.) that you can place on your desktop; the *Sidebar*, which contains icons for all the gadgets, is a source of great annoyance to many Vista users and has gone in Windows 7!

### From Russia, With Love

It appears the organized spam industry is gearing up for Valentine's Day by greatly increasing the volume of spam emails and by tailoring them with a Valentine theme. The majority of such emails follow the anatomical enhancement style but gaining ground is a whole series of messages offering free shopping cards by clicking on a link.

Of course, our readers are far too smart to be caught like that but it pays always to be on your guard and check any web links that are embedded in an email, even if the email does appear to come from a friendly source. In Outlook, simply pointing the mouse at an embedded link will show the true address to which [www.yourbank.co.uk](http://www.yourbank.co.uk) would take you if you clicked upon it.

And it goes without saying to ensure that your anti-virus product is kept up to date at all times!



## Windows 7 – still impressed! (continued from front page)

February 2009

Solutions!

The mouse gesture is one of the features Microsoft has introduced as an aid to productivity. The list of these is long but here are a couple of tasters...

Drag a window to the top of the screen and it'll maximise automatically; pull it down again and it'll return to its original dimensions.

Drag a window to the left of the screen and it'll resize to fit the left half of the screen. If you then drag another window to the right, it'll fill the right half of the screen, neatly butting up to the one on the left. It's now so easy to bring two documents side by side!

The Libraries feature allows you to hold 'pointers' to folders and files, so reaching them is easy even if they live deep inside your file system.

If you ever wanted to embed a part of a window in a Word document, email, etc., you'll know that, with XP or Vista, you needed to use Alt+PrtScr to take an image of the window, then use a drawing tool to cut away the bits you don't want. Now, the new Snipping Tool allows you to select any area of the screen then annotate, save, email or clipboard the image.

Security is an issue of great importance and Vista did make great strides towards a tight system. Most of these advances have been retained and refined in Windows 7 but one, the User Account Control or UAC, has had a makeover. In Vista, UAC would warn the user of any attempt to modify Windows or its settings by software. This is, on the face of it, a good idea—except UAC would pop up for just about any reason and thoroughly annoy everyone. In Windows 7, the user has control over the type of change which will cause the pop-up and the default setting is to warn when programs try to make changes to the computer but **not** to warn of changes to settings. Again, on the face of it a good idea. Unfortunately, the UAC itself is regarded as a setting so a user would receive no warning if rogue software switches off the UAC completely. Microsoft have been informed but, at the time of writing, regard this as "working as designed". We shall see whether their view changes under pressure!

Another aspect of security, and one much in the news recently, is the consequence of the loss of a USB data stick. Windows 7 includes "BitLocker To Go" with which you can simply and quickly encrypt data on a USB drive. Once Windows Server 2008 r2 is available, companies will be able to **enforce** that this is done.

All software contains bugs and sometimes things go wrong but, again, Windows 7 makes life easier, both for the users and for the support team looking after them. If a sequence of actions causes an error, simply switch on the Problem Steps Recorder; whilst recording, it logs keyboard and mouse actions and takes screenshots. You can add comments as required and, once recording is stopped, the whole log is compressed onto a zip file that can be sent to a support person for analysis.

Of course, one of the major questions asked about Windows 7 is, how does it perform?

Being a beta, it's still early to give an accurate view of performance but Windows 7 starts up and is ready for use somewhat faster than Vista and opening applications and windows appears much snappier, even on a low-spec PC. Because Windows 7's hardware requirements are less severe than Vista, it is anticipated that it will be quite happy to run on smaller PCs, laptops and even netbooks.

At the start of this ramble, I mentioned the stability of Windows 7. The quality of the beta has taken many reviewers by surprise; beta releases are not renowned for their stability but Windows 7 is quite polished. Because of this, some commentators anticipate a full version of the OS before the end of 2009 and, whether or not this turns out to be the case, it is unlikely that many businesses will now consider a move to Vista, or even to implement Vista Service Pack 2 if they have already made the migration.

In summary, Windows 7 appears set to be an exciting step forward for Microsoft and for its customers. Although based upon the kernel of Vista, Microsoft has made it more user-friendly and more business-acceptable. Indeed, Windows 7 is possibly the first major operating system release that requires *less* hardware than its predecessor! I look forward to its full release—and I believe the majority of businesses will enthusiastically plan their upgrades.

Please let us know what you think of [Solutions!](#) - email [solutions@tarragon.co.uk](mailto:solutions@tarragon.co.uk)