

HELP ARTICLES



Windows Vista's big offerings for the small office

Discover features that will help you run a more productive business

By Frank Lenk

Running a business from home has its ups and downs. Just ask Barbara Lang, who works as a "virtual assistant" through her own company.

"I left the corporate world four years ago to spend more time with my son," says Lang, whose company is called [Virtually Anything Administrative Services](#). Lang enjoys working from her basement office as much as the chance to work whatever time of day the mood suits her. Of course, the business still takes more time than she'd prefer. "Just ask my son," she laughs.

Lang is quite happy using Windows XP. And while she's been hearing about Windows Vista, she hasn't had the time to seriously consider making the switch. Here are a few ways Vista could help Lang work more efficiently.

Security

Security is an important consideration for Lang, who handles a lot of her clients' confidential documents. "I'm using an electronic firewall and a hardware router," she notes. This puts her ahead of many users, but malicious threats are on the rise, and every PC needs to be able to protect against them.

Vista includes Windows Defender, which regularly scans a computer, and tracks down unwanted or dangerous programs. Vista also runs Internet Explorer in a special mode, which prevents sites from surreptitious downloads.

The optional [Windows Live OneCare package](#) offers even more protection. While Vista's built-in firewall blocks intrusions from the Internet, OneCare adds extra filtering of incoming data (e-mails or downloads, for example). It also filters outgoing data, blocking spyware or other malicious software from sending information back to its creators.

Trevor Irvine, in-home service specialist with Future Shop in Nanaimo, BC, likes the way OneCare combines multiple protection in one product. "It seems to be a good solution for a lot of people," he notes. While helping users upgrade to Vista, Irvine has found OneCare to be faster to install and simpler to use than other, similar products.

Configuration

Setting up multiple computers, printers and other peripherals can be a problem for home offices, because, in fact, you are your own IT department. Lang purchased a second PC and a router with the intention of networking the two. "But I never did figure out how to do it properly," she says.

Windows Vista gives special attention to networking. The new Network and Sharing Center literally draws a diagram of your configuration, and makes it easy to enable or disable sharing of folders, or diagnose possible problems.

For home office users who need to connect to a corporate head office, setting up a VPN (Virtual Private Network) is also easier. A simple diagram shows the steps, allowing the remote user to gain secure access to their company's central network, either via an existing high-speed Internet connection or by dial-up.

Simple search

One problem that Lang doesn't have is finding information. "I can't say that I've struggled with that," she says. "I'm pretty organized."

But that makes her fairly unusual. "We've had cases where people have stored files in some really strange spots," laughs Irvine.

Vista's new Search capability makes it easy to find things, regardless of where they're stored. Vista searches instantly as you type, and you can search from the Start menu, or from any Explorer window. You can also open a more advanced Search pane and zero in on a file's details.

More mobility

When you do need to leave the home office, Windows Vista makes it easier to take your work with you. The new Mobility Center makes it easier to manage power usage and increase battery life. The Sync Center lets you keep current versions of your important data on both your desktop and portable.

Sync Center presents a single display that lets users synchronize files between desktop computers, laptops and personal devices such as Smartphones. This ensures that current, consistent versions of files are available on all devices used in the office or away from it.

Which version is best?

Irvine sees Windows Vista Home Premium as a good choice. It offers the full Aero desktop experience, and can handle more intensive media applications when you kick back at the end of a long day.

Windows Vista Business edition is more suitable if you need to log onto corporate networks. It includes Windows Meeting Space, which lets you quickly connect to other users over a wired or wireless network. Virtual communication can completely transform meetings — not to mention your business.

Office compatibility

At least one of Lang's concerns turns out to be no concern at all: Office 2007. Like many users, Lang had been worried that she needed to upgrade to Vista before upgrading Office.

That's a natural misconception, given that Office 2007 and Vista launched simultaneously. In fact, Lang could use Office 2007 with her Windows XP system, and benefit immediately from the improvements in usability and instant-preview formatting.

It's your choice whether you decide to upgrade Windows and Office in one operation or separately. After all, you're the boss!

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