Reasons for moving up to Windows 7

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Before we discuss the reasons for moving to a new Operating System (OS), we should consider why we would want to change the OS. After all, the OS is at the very heart of our computer's operation. If we are happy with the current operation, why change things, which could possibly lead to unknown problems. (The devil you know may be far friendlier than the devil that you don't know.) I think the reason is basically because technology does not stand still. Technology constantly improves and therefore changes. Don't we expect turn signals, power steering, power brakes, air conditioning, and even entertainment systems in our modern cars? Technologies change rapidly in their early stages and then slower as they mature. Automotive technology has changed quite a bit over the last 120 or so years, and is fairly mature now. (Think about all the automotive User Interfaces that have changed over time. Where is the high-beam lights control? It's not on the floor any more, is it.) Home computers are only about 30 years old. One might say they are still in the early, rapidly changing, years. But, unlike autos in the 50s (remember planned obsolescence?). I think the change from XP to Windows 7 is not just change for change sake. There are some very substantial improvements in the Windows 7 OS. Many of the reasons for change are "under the hood", like improved security, and simpler networking. These may be hard to appreciate, because they are not on the surface and obvious; but they are definitely present and useful. Obviously, the thing that is most noticeable is the User Interface. But it is not just a new overall look, new wallpaper, and a different color for the Taskbar.

Speaking of the Taskbar, the Taskbar is one of the major User Interface components that has been improved. The new Taskbar takes on qualities of the "Quick Launch area" that was available in XP, but not really promoted. The Taskbar not only helps you launch your applications, but it lets you easily view all of the open applications and allows you to move between windows and applications effortlessly. In addition to showing the applications that you currently have open, the new Windows 7 Taskbar supports "pinned" shortcuts to your most commonly used applications (and even websites). Click a shortcut when the app is running, and it brings the most recently used window to the foreground. Click the same shortcut when the app is closed, and it will launch the app.

Another Windows 7 enhancement comes in the form of Jump Lists. Jump Lists put frequently used files in a convenient menu that is a simple click away from the icon on the Taskbar or on the Start Menu. Apps that support Jump Lists will display the list when you right click on the shortcut, or when you left-click and drag the mouse up away from the Taskbar.

Windows Explorer has been enhanced in Windows 7. Anyone who has taken any of my classes knows, by now, that the Windows Explorer is the "keys to the kingdom". The

improvements to Windows Explorer make the left-column of the Windows Explorer window the quickest way to navigate to any folder on your hard drive or network. "Libraries" is another new Explorer feature. Libraries are simply data repositories that can store content that is of a similar nature, but located in different places on the computer, across a network, or in the cloud. Libraries are handy for organizing and collecting files in one place because they appear to be, and can be used as, normal folders for most applications. Libraries become especially useful when you integrate them with your commonly used folders, network shares, and cloud services. For example, let's say that both you and your spouse are users on your computer and suppose your music is stored in your Music folder, and your spouse's music is stored in another Music folder. And further let's say that you have some music stored on a second networked computer. If you wanted to play all of your music you could point your music software to all of the folders (if that was allowed), or you could create a Music Library that would contain the locations of all of your music folders and then point your software to the Music Library.

Another area of improvement is the use of Ribbons in the Windows 7 Accessory Applets. This may not seem like an improvement for those of you who preferred the traditional menus, but I think the more you use the Ribbons, the better you will like them; they do allow more information to be on the screen at one time without obscuring the work in progress.

Networking is another improved area. Windows 7 makes the home networking experience easier, faster and ultimately safer. Networking, in Windows 7, has been improved and made easier by the introduction of the "HomeGroup". The "WorkGroup" form of networking is still supported, but if all the computers in your network are using Windows 7 you can take advantage of the HomeGroup. A HomeGroup is easily set up by going to Control Panel - Networking and Sharing Center, and selecting "Choose homegroup and sharing options". Once you've created a HomeGroup, sharing files is as easy as right-clicking on a folder or file, clicking Share With, and selecting the options you want. When you want to share any of your files, or folders, or printers, on a network, you just Join the HomeGroup. Joining a HomeGroup is as easy as entering the HomeGroup password that you get from a computer that is already part of the HomeGroup that you wish to join. There are no permissions, or "network shares" to set up.

One surprise, when upgrading from XP or Vista to Windows 7, is that Microsoft has removed functionality from Windows. Windows Movie Maker, Windows Photo Gallery, and Windows Mail are no longer part of the initially installed OS. Instead, they are part of a separate, optional download called Windows Live Essentials.

Whether you're upgrading from XP or Vista, Windows 7 offers great improvements in usability and security. For anyone who regularly keeps many windows open at once time, the new Taskbar is worth the effort to upgrade alone. For XP users, the security improvements are equally worth the effort to upgrade. Windows 7 is the best version of

Windows that has been released, and is a worthy successor. Whether you're an average or a power user, Windows 7 is well worth the expense and effort, either for an upgrade to your current machine or to have on your next new machine. Now what about Windows 8? Stay tuned.