

Selecting the Right Vista Version

Chapter 1

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If you haven't purchased Vista yet—or you'd like to know whether or not it's worth upgrading to a more-capable version of Vista—this chapter is for you. A step-by-step procedure leads you through the ins and outs of selecting the right version of Vista for you.

A Quick Overview of All the Versions

It seems like Windows Vista has a lot more versions than Microsoft has ever offered before. But that isn't quite true. The Redmond company years ago split Windows XP into almost as many versions as we have today with Vista.

tip

You may occasionally hear Vista's versions referred to as SKUs. This term stands for Stock Keeping Unit. We'll use the more common terms *version* and *product version* throughout this book instead.

Here's a review of the major Windows XP versions (roughly in order of increasing power), which we'll compare with Vista's versions:

1. Windows XP Starter Edition (less-developed countries only)
2. Windows XP Home Edition N (European Union only)
3. Windows XP Home Edition
4. Windows XP Media Center Edition
5. Windows XP Tablet Edition
6. Windows XP Professional Edition N (European Union only)
7. Windows XP Professional Edition
8. Windows XP Professional x64 Edition

As we'll explain later, you may not have heard much about Windows XP Starter Edition because it was only preinstalled on PCs in emerging countries to offer a lower price point. The N editions (which do not include Windows Media Player) were sold only in Europe to satisfy antitrust requirements there. All Windows XP product versions, except Windows XP Professional x64 Edition, were available only in 32-bit versions.

All versions of Windows Vista, except Vista Starter, come in 32-bit and 64-bit versions. If we ignore for a moment the differences between 32-bit and 64-bit processing, the Starter edition, and the N editions, Windows Vista can be categorized into as few as five different flavors:

1. Vista Home Basic
2. Vista Home Premium
3. Vista Business
4. Vista Enterprise
5. Vista Ultimate

In a moment, we'll take you through a simple, step-by-step process that'll help you decide which version you need (or which version you might want to upgrade to, if you have a less-capable version). First, let's dispense with Vista Starter, N, and 32-bit versus 64-bit.

If You're Reading This, You Don't Need Starter

Windows Vista Starter is limited to 32-bit processors, supports only the basic Vista user interface, and will address a limited amount of RAM. It's designed only as a loss leader to get Windows' pricing down to a level that's competitive in less-developed countries.

Unless you're buying a PC in one of these countries, you probably won't hear much more about Vista Starter. And if you are buying such a PC, your computing needs are pretty basic, so it's unlikely that you're ready for this book just yet.

The N Editions Aren't For You, Either

Whatever Vista versions are being offered in Europe with an N moniker to satisfy the European Union's antitrust rulings, you also probably won't need them. The EU in 2004 began requiring Microsoft to offer versions of Windows without the Windows Media Player included. The requirement for a separate version of Windows was intended to enhance competition in the market for media players, such as the downloadable RealPlayer application.

Microsoft has (as of this writing) always sold its N versions for the same price as its full-featured Windows, so demand for the N versions never materialized. Until there's a big price difference, consumers will continue to interpret N to mean not interested.

If Your PC Is 64-Bit Ready, Run 64-Bit Vista

The differences between 32-bit Vista (usually referred to as the x86 version in honor of the 32-bit architecture of Intel's 80386, 80486, and Pentium processors) and 64-bit Vista are more complex. The good news is that, if you're buying a new PC with Vista preinstalled, it will probably come with 32-bit or 64-bit processing already enabled, depending on the chipset that powers your machine.

Any new 64-bit PC that's sold with Vista preinstalled will almost certainly come from the factory with 64-bit drivers and anything else that might be needed to support 64-bit processing. Since this is a chapter on selecting from among the five primary versions of Vista, we'll leave a full discussion of 32-bit versus 64-bit for another day.

A Few Simple Questions to Determine the Best Vista Version for You

If you're trying to decide which version of Windows Vista to buy for the first time, simply step through the following Q and A:

- 1. Will your PCs need to log on to an in-house network server?**
 - a.** If not, and your PCs will only need (at most) to access each other's files and printers via peer-to-peer networking, you only need a Home version of Vista. Go to Question 2.
 - b.** If your PCs need to log on to a network domain, you need a non-Home version. Go to Question 3.

2. **(To determine which Home version): Do you have a tablet PC, do you want to burn DVDs, or do you want to record and playback video content with Windows Media Center?**
 - a. If not, you can get by with Vista Home Edition.
 - b. If you need any of the above features, you need Vista Home Premium.
3. **(To determine which non-Home version): Does your company have a Volume Licensing deal with Microsoft?**
 - a. If yes, get Vista Enterprise, which enables you to create a centralized installation routine for Vista.
 - b. If not, get Vista Business, which is available at retail and has most of the features of Vista Enterprise (as described later in this chapter).
4. **(To determine whether you need Vista Ultimate): Do you need some features that are found only in Home Premium and some other features that are found only in the Business or Enterprise versions of Vista?**
 - a. If you need, for example, Windows Media Player (which is available only in Home Premium) and BitLocker drive encryption (only in Enterprise), get Vista Ultimate.
 - b. If you don't need such a comprehensive mix of features, save your money and buy a version of Vista that's cheaper than Vista Ultimate.

tip

Prices for the various versions of Vista can change at any time, and the list prices we show in this chapter will surely be discounted online. Before you select a version of Vista to buy, enter the search term **windows vista** into a price-comparison engine such as Shopping.com or PriceGrabber.com. Don't overspend to get a version of Vista that has features you'll never need.

Your decision on which version to purchase will be influenced by the cost difference of the more capable versions. We're showing in Table 1-1 the U.S. list prices for different Vista versions, even though better prices will certainly become available. The relative positioning of each version, however, is very likely to remain in the order shown here.

Table 1-1: U.S. List Prices for Different Vista Versions

Windows Vista Home Basic

Windows Vista Home Basic <i>Full</i>	\$199.00
Windows Vista Home Basic <i>Full</i> (additional license only, no disc)	\$179.00
Windows Vista Home Basic <i>Upgrade</i>	\$99.95
Windows Vista Home Basic <i>Upgrade</i> (additional license only)	\$89.95

Windows Vista Home Premium

Windows Vista Home Premium <i>Full</i>	\$239.00
Windows Vista Home Premium <i>Full</i> (additional license only)	\$215.00
Windows Vista Home Premium <i>Upgrade</i>	\$159.00
Windows Vista Home Premium <i>Upgrade</i> (additional license only)	\$143.00

Windows Vista Business

Windows Vista Business <i>Full</i>	\$299.00
Windows Vista Business <i>Full</i> (additional license only)	\$269.00
Windows Vista Business <i>Upgrade</i>	\$199.00
Windows Vista Business <i>Upgrade</i> (additional license only)	\$179.00

Windows Vista Ultimate

Windows Vista Ultimate <i>Full</i>	\$399.00
Windows Vista Ultimate <i>Full</i> (additional license only)	\$359.00
Windows Vista Ultimate <i>Upgrade</i>	\$259.00
Windows Vista Ultimate <i>Upgrade</i> (additional license only)	\$233.00

Although not every Vista version correlates exactly with an XP product version, the pricing is in line with XP pricing. For example, XP Home is currently USD \$189.00, compared to \$199.99 for Vista Home Basic, whereas XP Home Upgrade is \$89.97, just two cents off from the Vista Home Basic Upgrade. Upsells won't be particularly expensive, either: Pricing for the much more capable Vista Home Premium is just \$40 to \$60 higher than that of Home Basic.

Pricing in countries other than the United States will vary, but should adhere to the relative positioning shown in Table 1-1. At this writing, Microsoft's web site in Canada states that Windows Vista Ultimate will list for CAD \$450 in that country, compared with USD \$399 in the United States. Those two prices are about the same when currency exchange rates are factored in.

Secret

If you're buying a retail copy of Vista, and you already own a previous version of Windows, such as XP, don't buy a full version of Vista. Find out what Microsoft's current requirements are to qualify for an upgrade version, which is much cheaper. To successfully load an upgrade version, you usually must be installing onto a machine that has the old version installed, or you must have the old version on a CD (which you insert briefly during the installation of the new OS as proof). Microsoft can change these requirements at any time, so confirm this before whipping out your plastic.

Taking Advantage of Your Ability to Upgrade Vista

Table 1-2 shows how flexible Vista is in allowing you to upgrade to a more powerful version. It also describes some of the limitations of the various versions.

tip

This table, and the others in this chapter, are based on information provided by Microsoft in its *Vista Product Guide*. The information was accurate at press time but can be changed by the Redmond company whenever it pleases. If a specific feature is crucial to your needs, ensure that it's still in a particular Vista version before you lay out your dough.

Windows Anytime Upgrade

Unlike previous versions of Windows, Vista installs itself with the capability to upgrade from a weaker version to a more-capable version at any time. You simply run the Anytime Upgrade applet, select a source to purchase an upgrade license from, and your PC is quickly enhanced with the more powerful version you've selected.

- ♦ **Vista Home Basic** can be upgraded in this way to Home Premium or Ultimate.
- ♦ **Vista Home Premium** and **Vista Business** can be upgraded to Ultimate.

At this writing, it doesn't appear that the Home versions of Vista can be upgraded in this way to Vista Business or Enterprise. It also doesn't seem likely that the Enterprise version will allow an easy upgrade path to Vista Ultimate. Purchasing a more capable version of Vista at retail and installing it over a lesser version may be the only way to migrate in these cases.

RAM Limitations of Vista Versions

The Home versions of Vista suffer from some stricter limitations on available main memory and peer-to-peer networking than the non-Home versions. We'll summarize these limits as follows:

- ♦ **32-bit Vista versions** will always be limited to 4 GB of RAM, due to limitations of x86 processors.
- ♦ **64-bit Vista versions** have dramatically different limitations in the various editions:
 - **Home Basic** is limited to 8 GB of RAM.
 - **Home Premium** is limited to 16 GB of RAM.
 - **Business, Enterprise, and Ultimate** can access over 128 GB of RAM.

Peer-to-Peer Networking Limitations

Peer-to-peer networking, called SMB (for small-to-medium business) networking by Microsoft, is also artificially restricted:

- ♦ **Home Basic** can support only 5 peer-to-peer connections;
- ♦ **All other Vista versions** can support 10 peer-to-peer connections.
- ♦ **Business, Enterprise, and Ultimate** can support many more connections, of course, with users logging on to one or more network servers.

Table 1-2: Version Limitations and Upgrade Paths

	<i>Home Basic</i>	<i>Home Premium</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>	<i>Ultimate</i>
Comparison of version limitations:					
Maximum RAM supported with 32-bit system	4 GB	4 GB	4 GB	4 GB	4 GB
Maximum RAM supported with 64-bit system	8 GB	16 GB	128+ GB	128+ GB	128+ GB
Simultaneous SMB peer network connections	5	10	10	10	10
Windows Anytime Upgrade:					
Upgrade to Home Premium or Ultimate	Yes	—	—	—	—
Upgrade to Ultimate	—	Yes	Yes	—	—

The home versions of Vista are more limited than the business versions in general, but they also include some multimedia functionality that's not available to Vista Business users. If the restrictions of a lesser version prevent you from using a feature you need in a more capable version, it's easy to upgrade Vista's Home and Business versions to Vista Ultimate. To do so, you can use the built-in Anytime Upgrade applet (see Figures 1-1 and 1-2).



Figure 1-1: Anytime Upgrade. This applet, found in Home Basic, Home Premium, and Business versions of Vista, makes it easy for Basic users to upgrade to Premium. Users of Basic, Premium, and Business versions can also upgrade to Vista Ultimate.



Figure 1-2: Choose your partner. Microsoft sends users of its Anytime Upgrade applet to other authorized dealers of Windows, where you purchase a license for a more capable version of Vista.

Choosing Between Home Basic and Home Premium

Table 1-3 shows the distinct features that differ between the Basic and Premium versions of Vista for home users. If you've decided that a Home version of Vista is all you need, Table 1-3 will help you decide which of the two available versions will best suit you.

- ♦ **Choose Home Basic** if you don't need Media Center capabilities, the ability to burn DVDs, or any of the other features shown in Table 1-3 that come with Home Premium.
- ♦ **Choose Home Premium** if you have a tablet PC (actually, it'll be hard to buy a tablet PC that doesn't have at least Vista Premium installed on it) or if you need the more extensive multimedia features of the premium version.

tip

The list prices for the upgrade versions of Home Premium are about 60 percent higher than the same versions of Home Basic. But the full versions are only 20 percent higher. So, if you find yourself buying a retail copy of the full version of Vista Home, paying a little extra to get Home Premium seems like a pretty easy decision.

Table 1-3: Comparing Home Basic and Home Premium

	<i>Home Basic</i>	<i>Home Premium</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>	<i>Ultimate</i>
Only Home Basic, Home Premium, and Ultimate:					
Parental controls	Yes	Yes	—	—	Yes
Windows Movie Maker	Yes	Yes	—	—	Yes
Only Home Premium and Ultimate:					
Themed slide shows	—	Yes	—	—	Yes
Windows Media Center	—	Yes	—	—	Yes
Windows Media Center — high-definition TV	—	Yes	—	—	Yes
Windows Media Center — CableCard support	—	Yes	—	—	Yes
Support for Media Center Extenders, incl. Xbox 360	—	Yes	—	—	Yes
Windows DVD Maker	—	Yes	—	—	Yes
In all versions except Home Basic:					
Windows Aero user interface	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Tablet PC with touch-screen support	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows SideShow	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Movie Maker HD	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Backup of user files to a network device	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Scheduled backup of user files	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Network Projection	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Presentation Settings	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New premium games	—	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	Yes
Windows Meeting Space	View only	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Feature is optional

Choosing Between Vista Business and Enterprise

Table 1-4 shows the features that are present in the Business and Enterprise versions of Vista but not the Home versions, and a few features Enterprise has that Business doesn't. Vista Ultimate, as we'll discuss later in this chapter, also supports all of Vista's non-Home features.

- ♦ **Both the Business and Enterprise versions**, unlike the Home versions, support domain networking. This enables users to log on to a network server using Microsoft's Active Directory (AD) technology and share centrally managed resources.
- ♦ **Enterprise supports a few additional features**, which might be crucial for your business:
 - **BitLocker drive encryption** enables you to securely encrypt files and folders. You can require that users must have a physical token to decrypt and access these resources, protecting them from view if a PC is stolen or otherwise used by an unauthorized person.
 - **Applications written for Unix** can run under Vista Enterprise. This can greatly expand the number of programs your company can run on a given system.
 - **Virtual PC Express** enables you to run one virtual computer session in Vista Enterprise. This session could host a different operating system—Windows XP or even Windows 95, for example—in which you might run a legacy program that isn't compatible with Vista.

Table 1-4: Comparing Vista Business and Vista Enterprise

	<i>Home Basic</i>	<i>Home Premium</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>	<i>Ultimate</i>
Only Business, Enterprise, and Ultimate:					
Support for processors in two sockets	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows ShadowCopy	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
System image-based backup and recovery	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Encrypting File System	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Desktop deployment tools for managed networks	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Policy-based quality of service for networking	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Rights Management Services (RMS) client	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control over installation of device drivers	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes

	<i>Home Basic</i>	<i>Home Premium</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>	<i>Ultimate</i>
Network Access Protection Client Agent	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pluggable logon authentication architecture	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Integrated smart card management	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wireless network provisioning	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Domain join for Windows Server	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Domain join for Windows Small Business Server	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Group Policy support	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Offline files and folder support	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Client-side caching	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Roaming User Profiles	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Folder Redirection	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Centralized power management via Group Policy	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Fax and Scan	—	—	Yes	Yes*	Yes*
Internet Information Server	—	—	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*
Only Business and Ultimate:					
Small Business Resources	—	—	Yes	—	Yes
Only Enterprise and Ultimate:					
Windows BitLocker drive encryption	—	—	—	Yes	Yes
All 36 worldwide UI languages available	—	—	—	Yes	Yes
Simultaneous install of multiple UI languages	—	—	—	Yes	Yes
Subsystem for Unix-based applications	—	—	—	Yes	Yes
Virtual PC Express	—	—	—	Yes	Yes
Only Ultimate:					
Windows Ultimate Extras	—	—	—	—	Yes

*Feature is optional

As you can see, most of the features of Enterprise are also in Business, except BitLocker, multilanguage support, Unix capabilities, and virtual-machine support.

Features Available in All Vista Versions

For completeness's sake, features that exist in all versions of Vista are listed in Table 1-5, in no particular order. If this table offers you all the Windows features you'll ever want, then Vista Home Basic may be enough for you.

This would particularly be true if you plan to use Vista solely to browse the Web and occasionally check your e-mail. In that case, the improved Internet Explorer 7 and Windows Mail programs — present in all Vista versions — might be adequate to serve your needs.

Microsoft, of course, hopes that the features of Home Basic are, well, too basic for you. If so, you'll have to pony up a higher amount for one of the pricier versions. We hope we've presented in this chapter all the details you need to make an informed decision.

Table 1-5: Features Present in All Five Major Vista Versions

	<i>Home Basic</i>	<i>Home Premium</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>	<i>Ultimate</i>
Remote Desktop	Client only	Client only	Client and host	Client and host	Client and host
Windows Mobility Center	Partial	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Vista basic user interface	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Security Center	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Defender	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Firewall	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Update	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Internet Explorer 7 with Tabbed Browsing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Internet Explorer 7 RSS Feed Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Internet Explorer 7 Protected Mode	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Internet Explorer 7 Fix My Settings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anti-phishing in Internet Explorer 7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anti-phishing in Windows Mail	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Service Hardening	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
User Account Control	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Performance self-tuning and hardware diagnostics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Next-generation TCP/IP stack	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
IPv6 and IPv4 support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows ReadyDrive	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	<i>Home Basic</i>	<i>Home Premium</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>	<i>Ultimate</i>
Windows Display Driver Model (WDDM)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Easy Transfer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows SuperFetch	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows ReadyBoost	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
64-bit processor support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fast Startup, Fast Shutdown, Sleep	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ad hoc backup and recovery of user files and folders	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instant Search	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Automatic content organization via properties/tags	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Support for WinFX	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Low-priority I/O	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Automatic hard disk defragmentation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Mail	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Calendar	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Sidebar	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Photo Gallery	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Media Player 11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Games Explorer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Updated games	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Speech Recognition	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Accessibility Settings and Ease of Access Center	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Welcome Center	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
XPS Document support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Network Center	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Network Diagnostics and troubleshooting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows HotStart	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sync Center	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Universal game controller support	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	Yes

*Feature is optional

With the exception of the Remote Desktop and the Mobility Center for portable PCs—both of which are limited in the Home versions—most of the features of Windows Vista are the same in all versions.

Secret

One big feature you don't get with Windows Vista Home Basic is the beautiful Windows Aero user interface, which we'll look at in detail later in the book. If you want the absolute best graphical experience, don't pick Home Basic.

Choosing the Whole Enchilada – Vista Ultimate

You can use Tables 1-2 through 1-5 to compare those features of the lesser Vista versions that come together in Microsoft's priciest product: Vista Ultimate. To get it, you'll pay a list price of \$60 to \$100 more than Vista Business or \$100 to \$160 more than Home Premium. Without knowing what your specific needs may be, it's impossible for us to say whether you'll want or need this enormous package.

As we stated previously, the only serious reason to pay extra to get Vista Ultimate is if you absolutely must have two features, one of which exists only in Home Premium (such as Windows Media Center) and the other of which can only be obtained in Business or Enterprise (such as domain login).

At the time of this writing, Microsoft promises to release a number of add-ons called the Windows Ultimate Extras. These weren't well defined at all, however, when we went to press. You'll have to be the judge of whether these extras are worth anything to you or your business.

Of course, you might purchase Vista Ultimate just because you want everything Microsoft has to offer, and cost is no object. If so—*enjoy!*

Summary

Windows Vista certainly offers a lot of choice when it comes to picking a product version, but with a little know-how, you will be able to make the right choice, one that matches both your needs and your budget. We've given you what you need to know to match a Vista version to your needs. Now, you just need to figure out how much the upgrade is going to cost. Remember that it's often much cheaper to acquire a new Windows version with a new PC, so if you're going to be buying a new PC, be sure to get the right Vista version at that time. We'll look this option in Chapter 2.