Windows 7 part II: How to upgrade

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 This is a special Windows 7 edition of Stump the PC Club, the OCRegister's weekly free tech-advice column written by members of the North Orange County Computer Club. Since Windows 7 has arrived and there have been many questions about it, these articles are devoted to answering some of those questions.

Earlier in the series:

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- **All your Windows 7 questions answered, part I**

How to upgrade to Windows 7

Once you decide to take the plunge, users must choose how to upgrade to Windows 7.

The majority of Windows users out there can opt for the Windows 7 upgrade, rather than paying the full-version price. But there's more work for Windows XP users than Windows Vista users. XP users must use the Custom Install rather than the easier In-Place Upgrade. As long as you have a licensed copy of XP or Vista installed, you can purchase the upgrade version of Windows 7 and avoid the more expensive full version.

There are two ways to move to Windows 7:

- In-Place Upgrade
- Custom Install

1. In-Place Upgrade

This is performed by booting up your computer, inserting the Windows 7 disc into your DVD drive and following the prompts. Unfortunately, only Windows Vista users can do this. Windows XP users need to skip to the alternative below.

The in-place upgrade method preserves all of your data, settings and already installed programs such as Microsoft Office. When you run the Upgrade Advisor, it will warn you of any incompatible programs such as Norton Anti Virus 2009, see http://bit.ly/E7aDD.

You can uninstall this program before upgrading. Of course you will have to install a new antivirus program when you are finished such as the free Microsoft Security Essentials (at http://www.microsoft.com/Security_Essentials). Before you install any antivirus make sure it is compatible with Windows 7 and also consider whether it is a 32-bit or 64-bit versions.

Don't forget to backup data! Don't depend on this installation to back up your data, do it yourself beforehand to be safe. This type of upgrade can take several hours or more depending on how many documents, videos, music and other data is stored on your PC. Microsoft says it has seen it take up to 21 hours. The chart below tells you if your current version of Vista is eligible for this type of upgrade. Note that Vista must be Service Pack 1 or later.

Supported Paths for In-Place Upgrades from Windows Vista

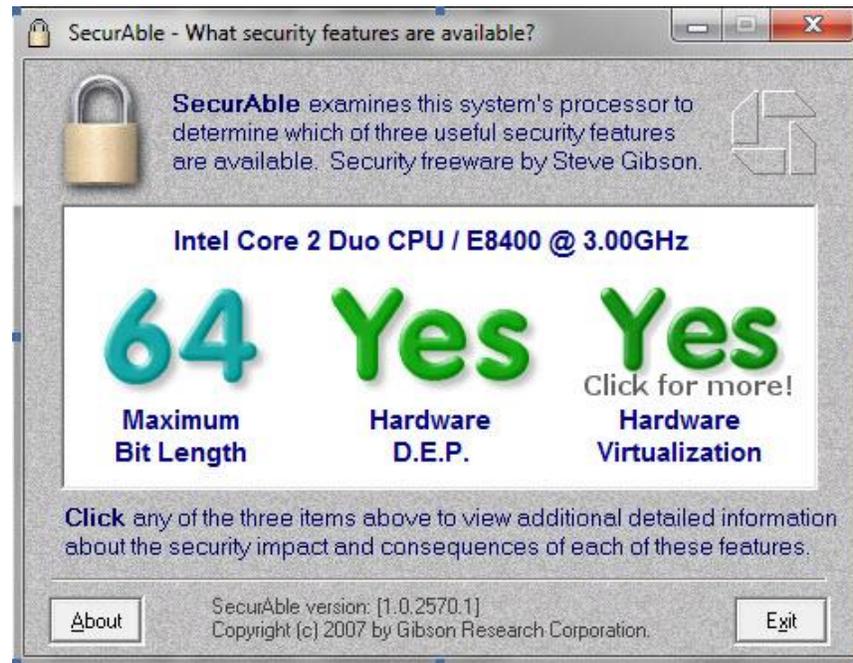| If Your Current Operating System Is	You Can Upgrade To
Windows Vista Home Basic	Windows 7 Home Basic, Home Premium, Ultimate
Windows Vista Home Premium	Windows 7 Home Premium, Ultimate
Windows Vista Business	Windows 7 Professional, Ultimate
Windows Vista Ultimate	Windows 7 Ultimate

If you wish to upgrade to a version not covered by this chart you can still do it but you will have to perform a custom install, as described next.

2. Custom Install

This is initiated by booting your PC from the Windows 7 disc. If you can't upgrade your computer from Windows Vista to Windows 7 per the above chart, you'll need to use this method and select the Custom option during the Windows 7 installation. A custom installation doesn't preserve your programs, files, data, or settings. It's sometimes called a "clean" installation for that reason. Microsoft has more information at "Upgrading from Windows Vista to Windows 7" (link: bit.ly/3WYJGP). This type of installation requires a little savvy but results in a cleaner PC when completed.

When you purchase Windows 7 it comes with a 32-bit and 64-bit disc. To determine if your PC can run the 64-bit version you can download and run the free SecurAble program from Gibson Research Corp. (www.grc.com), a Laguna Hills computer security firm. With a 64-bit installation your PC will be able to take advantage of additional memory. The 32-bit systems can only utilize approximately 3.5 gigabytes of RAM

whereby 64-bit systems can utilize 16 gigabytes for Windows 7 Home Premium and 192 gigabytes for higher versions.

SecurAble - What security features are available?

SecurAble examines this system's processor to determine which of three useful security features are available. Security freeware by Steve Gibson.

Intel Core 2 Duo CPU / E8400 @ 3.00GHz

64 Yes Yes
Click for more!

Maximum Bit Length   Hardware D.E.P.   Hardware Virtualization

Click any of the three items above to view additional detailed information about the security impact and consequences of each of these features.

About   SecurAble version: [1.0.2570.1] Copyright (c) 2007 by Gibson Research Corporation.   Exit

When the installation begins there will be two choices, Upgrade and Custom (advanced). Select the Custom (advanced) to perform a Custom Install. Note that this choice allows you to completely format your hard drive and provides you with a PC with only Windows 7 installed. However, you will have to perform the following tasks after installation:

- Install a compatible Anti-virus program such as the free Microsoft Security Essentials
- Run Microsoft Windows Update
- Reinstall all of your programs
- Restore all of your data from your previous configuration. You did save it didn't you
- Find all of the drivers for your hardware that Windows 7 did not find possibly including your video card, network, printers, etc. Actually, you should locate all of your drivers beforehand and save them to an external drive.
- Possibly import your e-mail address into your e-mail program so be sure to back them up

Remember, upgrading to Windows 7 will end any support from your manufacturer unless you received a free upgrade with the purchase of your new PC directly from them. Even then I'd check with them first.

Here are some of the things that can go wrong:

- For notebook users, some of the functions including special buttons, web cameras, etc. may not work unless the manufacturer publishes Windows 7 drivers.
- Some older hardware may not work. But if the hardware works with Vista, it's more likely to work with Windows 7.
- Some of your existing programs may not run any longer.
- It's been known to happen that the in-place upgrade fails and leaves you in quite a mess. For this reason alone I'd make a backup image of my entire PC first using a program such as Acronis True Image, available for $74 at www.acronis.com or Shadow Protect, available for $79.95 at www.storagecraft.com. There is also a free program called Macruim Reflect for this purpose which is available at www.macrium.com.

Summary:

- Whenever you choose to upgrade from a 32-bit to a 64-bit version or vice versa, you will have to perform a Custom Install.
- You can purchase the upgrade media of any version of Windows 7 and perform a custom install on any PC that has a fully licensed XP or Vista operating system. If you look at the chart at bit.ly/11K7ws , anywhere it indicates that an "In-Place Install" is available, you can still perform a Custom Install but not vice versa.
- Upgrade Installs have to be performed according to the chart above and Vista must have Service Pack 1 or higher installed
- Before performing any of the above options, download and run the Windows Upgrade Advisor to determine if you have any conflicting hardware or software.
- Run the Easy Transfer Wizard from your previous version of Windows and backup everything to an external hard drive. You can use your own backup method also. I recommend this whether you are performing an upgrade or custom install.
- Free upgrades for Windows for new PCs must be installed as an In-Place Upgrade
- Remember, to perform a Custom Install, you need to boot from the Windows 7 DVD and to perform an In-place upgrade you must run the Windows 7 installation from your current Vista operating system
- For best results, prepare a Windows 7 upgrader's toolbox. It should include:
  - All of your hardware drivers
  - An external hard drive
  - A copy of the Easy Transfer Wizard (Vista already has it)
  - Your new Windows 7 DVD
  - A disk imaging program if you want to backup your PC before doing anything else. For more information on drivers look at a previous article bit.ly/2OzduW.

My final advice is to avoid In-Place Upgrades if possible and perform a Custom Install. It's more work but it results in a cleaner machine.

For more articles and sample Upgrade Advisor Reports on Windows 7, visit my personal site at www.edwardns.com/windows7.html. *~Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his Web site at www.edwardns.com.*