IDC
Analyze the Future

IDC EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Windows 7 Done Right: From Migration to Implementation

July 2010

Adapted from *Deployment Opportunities for Windows 7* by Matt Healey, Al Gillen, and Cushing Anderson, IDC #223694

Sponsored by Symantec

Global Headquarters: 5 Speen Street Framingham, MA 01701 USA P.508.872.8200 F.508.935.4015 www.idc.com

Introduction

For many enterprises, an unstoppable clock began ticking down toward the end of Microsoft Windows XP's support life cycle with the release of Windows Vista in January 2007. In the case of Windows XP, Mainstream Support concluded in the spring of 2009, and Extended Support will retire on April 8, 2014. If that was not enough, on July 13, 2010, the Extended Support phase for Windows XP Service Pack 2 will end, leaving Windows XP Service Pack 3 as the only supported version of the product in use.

The phased conclusion of the Windows XP life cycle has led to an interesting situation, made even more urgent by the market's broad resistance to adopting and deploying Windows Vista and the hesitancy to upgrade service packs and add new features to Windows XP installations. Many organizations have frozen or locked down their Windows XP installations and today are disinterested in making any changes, including adding new service packs or features, that would likely trigger a round of regression and compliance testing and documentation.

Of specific concern is the discontinuation of security patches under the traditional support agreements. Typically, security patches are issued after a vulnerability is discovered so that users can update quickly and protect their systems from possible malware attacks.

After Extended Support ends, Microsoft will no longer issue security patches for new vulnerabilities that could leave organizations susceptible to possible attacks. Organizations that do not address these resulting gaps in security are leaving themselves open to a variety of potential problems, ranging from security vulnerabilities, availability problems, complex and time-consuming support concerns, and potentially even regulatory compliance issues.

To address these concerns, the user base is quickly coming to the conclusion that it has to get serious about evaluating Windows 7, creating an action plan for adoption, and addressing the adoption blockers that are sure to be in its way.

User Perspectives

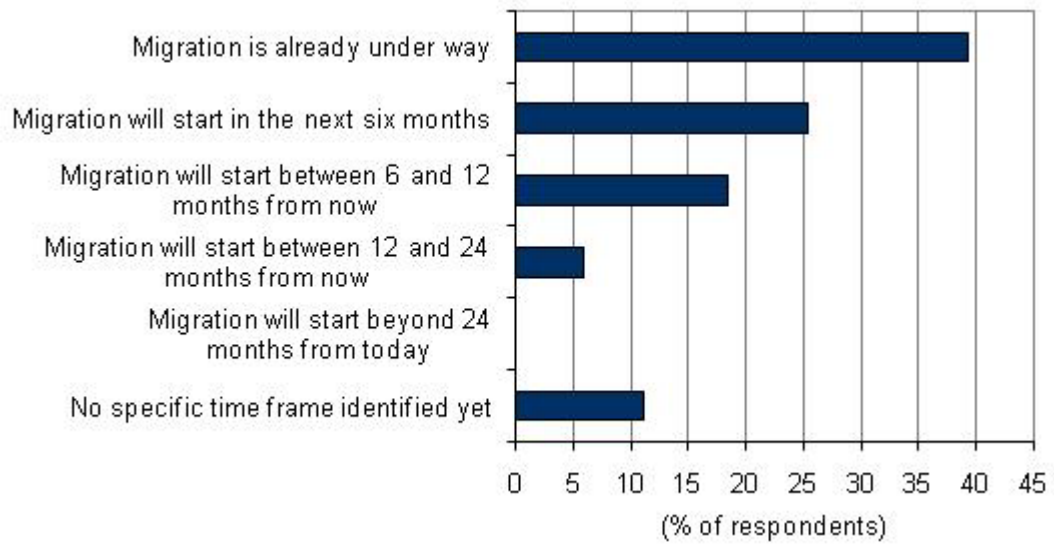
IDC has conducted demand-side research with end users to measure their receptiveness to Windows 7 and understand how far into the migration planning process they are. In a study conducted in April 2010, we surveyed 690 individuals — 390 IT professionals and 300 end users — to gauge their plans for and experiences with Windows 7 (and for the end users, Windows 7 and/or Office 2000).

The IT professionals who participated in the study intend to migrate approximately two-thirds of the Windows XP PCs they are responsible for supporting over to Windows 7. We found that 31.6% of the PCs would be migrated by replacing both the hardware and the OS at the same time. Almost 30% of the PCs would be updated by migrating to a new OS without replacing the hardware (which IDC finds to be a remarkably high number from a historical context).

In addition to the percentage of systems that enterprises intend to migrate, IDC also found that 64.7% of organizations surveyed indicated that their migration to Windows 7 either has already begun or will begin within the next six months (see Figure 1). The timeline for deployment indicates that 5.8% expect to begin a migration cycle between 12 and 24 months from now, while another 11.1% cited no specific timetable for Windows 7 migration.

FIGURE 1

Windows 7 Migration Time Frame



n = 343

Source: IDC's *Windows 7 and Office 2007 Migration and Training Survey*, 2010

Overall, IDC sees this as an aggressive timeline for customers to move forward with Windows 7 adoption and deployments. We believe these aggressive projected timelines show that enterprises understand that they will need to migrate off of Windows XP in the near-term future and are serious about addressing that forthcoming migration initiative.

Getting from Here to Windows 7

The typical IT organization likely will have to overcome a number of common issues, including the following:

- **Application compatibility.** IDC sees application compatibility as one of the most pressing concerns for end users when planning for a migration to Windows 7. There are number of solutions to application compatibility, including replacement of applications, repair of problem applications, and use of modern solutions such as application virtualization to overcome incompatibility issues.

- **PC refresh or in-place upgrades.** Windows 7 offers users the rare opportunity to upgrade without a corresponding increase in processor, disk, and memory resources. However, for many users — particularly those who do not have Microsoft Software Assurance — the cost-effectiveness of doing an in-place upgrade to Windows 7 is difficult to justify financially.

- **Long-term solution.** Like Windows XP before it, Windows 7 is likely to be a very long-term deployment and will likely be heavily used through the majority of this decade. As a result, any deployment decisions that IT professionals make today are likely to have deep and long-term implications. As a result, it is critical to make sure this migration is "done right."

Making It Better, Not Just Newer

IDC believes that a Windows 7 migration provides an excellent (and increasingly rare) opportunity for enterprises to rethink their client-side deployment and configuration. This migration offers the mechanism to add new functionality and efficiencies to existing computing environments by using features new to Windows 7 and through a collection of modern third-party solutions that add value to Windows 7.

Some of those considerations include the following:

- **Security solutions.** Windows 7 includes security improvements, notably the improved User Account Control feature, which enables IT professionals to configure end users to operate in user mode rather than as administrators. Other security-related features, such as BitLocker, are fully available only to customers that have Software Assurance subscriptions (which gives them access to the Windows 7 Enterprise product). Some organizations will likely want to supplement these basic options to ensure a higher degree of security. There are a number of third-party security solutions that build on Windows 7's base features.

- **Antivirus and antimalware solutions.** Despite Windows 7's improved basic security capabilities, there remains an essential need for antimalware and antivirus solutions to be installed aboard Windows to maximize protection for corporate data and users' personal information.

- **Integrated backup.** Microsoft continues to enhance server-based technologies such as shadow copies and roaming user profiles. However, many organizations don't have the technical sophistication or the willingness to implement those forms of solutions. As a result, third-party backup and recovery solutions continue to offer a critical addition to a Windows 7 deployment to ensure the recoverability of local data in the event of a system failure or a lost or destroyed machine.

- **Life-cycle management.** IDC has done significant research around the topic of infrastructure optimization. One of the conclusions from our research is that over time, operating systems and the application portfolios they support diverge into what eventually is a collection of instance-unique machines. As system diversity increases, the ability of IT to confidently (and successfully) centrally deploy new applications, patches, and fixes diminishes. The result is that management is compromised, agility is reduced, and end users experience more frequent and longer outages due to system configurations. Use of change and configuration management tools, along with tighter management policies, can help prevent this scenario from playing out.

- **Client virtualization technologies.** Client virtualization technology has matured dramatically in the past several years, and today organizations have a robust portfolio of client virtualization technologies that, in IDC's opinion, should be an integral part of a Windows 7 deployment plan. These technologies may include solutions such as application virtualization and application streaming, as well as use of centralized virtual desktops (also known as VDI).

Ensuring Windows 7 Is a Better Client OS

After the adoption cycle of Windows 7, future opportunities to rethink the client PC software stack are unlikely to present themselves. For many organizations, there will never be a better time to clean house, optimize the software stack in use, and leverage modern technologies to ensure the long-term reliability and manageability of Windows 7 installations.

Windows 7 can be deployed using the same approaches that were used with Windows XP, but those outdated approaches fail to prepare organizations to benefit from reduced management costs and more efficient client-side management.

Benefits of Smart Migration Planning

IDC sees multiple benefits with a smart migration to Windows 7 using all the tools and capabilities that are available to IT professionals. Benefits include:

- **Smoother and faster migration.** Application virtualization is one technology that speeds the migration process, simply because applications can be configured to provision themselves onto PCs as users log in or at the first touch of the application. As a result, desktops and laptops can be configured with a base operating system image, and part — or all — of the application portfolio can be delivered automatically.
- **Ability to limit user administrative rights.** This not only protects the security of a system and ensures that the system is not misconfigured but also helps ensure that users don't unwittingly cause downtime and outages on their systems.
- **Having known system configurations.** An extremely positive outcome of known system configurations is that it becomes far easier to deploy new applications or change system settings, with a predictable outcome due to a far smaller number of (or, potentially, no) outlier configurations.
- **Minimizing business disruptions.** Having a better-managed and more recoverable client infrastructure means that business outages will be minimal in number, and when they do happen, they will be shorter in duration.
- **Happier end users.** Having reliable systems running with known and easily maintained configurations leads to better user productivity and happier end users. When end users are happy, IT professionals will probably be happier too.

Challenges

No migration is without challenges. In the case of Windows 7, there are a number of considerations.

Cost is a commonly cited challenge for IT organizations. In fact, in the survey cited earlier in this document, IDC found that cost was the number 1 factor impeding Windows 7 migrations.

In addition, it is necessary to embrace the change to Windows 7 and not merely plug Windows 7 in as a direct replacement for Windows XP using outdated deployment and management paradigms.

Conclusion

IDC sees broad movement in the industry as companies gear up for corporate adoption of Windows 7. This wave of adoption will continue to gather speed and size over the next 12–18 months.

We don't advocate that organizations migrate to Windows 7 immediately simply because the product is here; in fact, quite the opposite — we strongly advocate that organizations move at a pace and time appropriate for their business and that they develop a well-crafted migration plan that leverages application virtualization and new management paradigms. This is an opportunity to migrate the right way and gain a return on the investment that will last a decade.