

Microsoft introduces Internet Explorer 7 for Windows XP

by Vanessa Ho

Microsoft Corp. has announced the availability of Internet Explorer 7 (IE 7) for Windows XP. The latest version of the company's Web browser provides users with a greater level of security, makes everyday tasks easier and works well with existing Web sites that customers visit.

New features include advanced safeguards that help protect users against malicious software and phishing attacks. The IE 7 browser has also been fortified to reduce exposure to these sorts of attacks. As well, the new browser provides better information to users that assists them in making better and safer online decisions.

Michelle Warren, senior IT industry analyst with Partners Research Corporation, said the release of IE 7 has been highly anticipated and added that Microsoft had to update IE in light of competition from Mozilla and Firefox.

"The timing is good [too] because you have Vista looming and Office 2007 coming," she said.

Carmi Levy, senior research analyst with Info-Tech Research Group added that it was absolutely critical for Microsoft to release IE 7 for XP and not simply wait for Vista to hit the market.

"Vista will not dominate the market for quite some time and for the foreseeable future, the number of systems running XP will far outnumber those running Vista," said Levy.

"The sad truth is IE 6 is long past its best-before date," he added. "Continuing to use IE 6 on XP would not be an acceptable option, not when you consider the increasingly secure and feature-rich alternatives that are now available. Bringing IE 7 to market for XP in advance of the Vista rollout allows Microsoft to finally retire its old-dog IE 6 as it prepares the landscape for its next major OS release. It also gives the market another robust browser alternative after years of waiting for competition to return to the space."

Prior to competition from Firefox and Mozilla, said Levy, Internet Explorer was pretty much the only viable browser in town.

"Because it was so dominant in this space, browser innovation suffered for the better part of five years because Microsoft was under no competitive pressure to bring new features to market. All that changed as Firefox gained traction and convinced the market that a more secure, more feature-rich application had a fighting chance against the stagnant incumbent," said Levy. He added that this left Microsoft in a rather uncomfortable defensive position where it either had to innovate or risk losing even more market share and mind share to upstarts like Firefox.

New features of IE 7 include a new look and enhanced capabilities such as tabbed browsing. This feature lets users view multiple sites in a single browser window where they can easily switch from one site to another.

"Tabbed browsing was necessary because the competition had it and it is liked and used by users [because] it makes for an easier online experience," said Warren.

For developers and IT managers, IE 7 has been engineered to be compatible with existing Web sites by adhering to some of the most important standards for Web site development. IE 7 also features improved manageability for enterprises through the enhanced support of Active Directory Group Policy, which enables IT managers to easily deploy and centrally manage the browser on each of the desktops in their network.

Levy said that everyone benefits from the new features that Microsoft has introduced to IE 7.

"Consumers benefit because they now have a tool that allows them to navigate online content more thoroughly, more safely and more quickly. Developers benefit because they now have a richer target environment for their development efforts. IT managers benefit



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because they now have a more secure browser that promises to consume fewer administrative resources," he said.

Even with all these new features, Warren said there are some limitations to the new browser. Currently, IE 7 is only available for users that have Windows XP with Windows XP Service Pack 2 (SP2) installed.

"It is not available to those on Macs or for those that don't use Windows but a Linux platform. Those users can't use IE 7," she said. If IE 7 was available to non-Windows users or those that haven't installed SP2, it could drive wider adoption of the browser, Warren suggested.

While IE 7 for Windows XP is available now for download in English, Microsoft anticipates that it will take several months to complete distribution worldwide of the browser in other Windows-supported languages.



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