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November 27, 2006

**Vista: On the Horizon**

*Microsoft's new flagship desktop operating system represents both a challenge and an opportunity for buyers and sellers of technology services. Here's how to tip the scales toward a successful deployment*

by **Bob Violino**[Global Services](#)

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WHENEVER A MAJOR NEW operating system ships, many organizations turn to service providers for help with evaluating, testing and installing the software. Microsoft's Windows Vista, slated for general availability in February 2007, is no exception.

The upcoming migration to Windows Vista does have its share of potential challenges and opportunities for organizations of all sizes — buyers of technology services — as well as the service providers that will help companies migrate. Perhaps more than other operating systems in recent memory, Vista requires that companies do their homework on hardware requirements and user training before plunging ahead with a large-scale migration.

Microsoft is slated to deliver Vista to volume license business customers in November, and will make the product broadly available worldwide in January. The new operating system is designed to provide security enhancements, improved user experiences and new communications features.

The Vista product lineup consists of six versions, including two for businesses: Windows Vista Business and Windows Vista Enterprise. Vista Business is aimed at organizations of all sizes and has features such as a new user interface called Windows Aero, which provides a transparent glass design with effects including reflections and animations; an integrated search capability; and tablet PC functions such as handwriting recognition.

Vista Enterprise is geared toward large global organizations and those with highly complex IT infrastructure. In addition to the features available in Vista Business, Enterprise is designed to provide higher levels of data protection through hardware-based encryption technology.

Organizations that are planning or considering a move to Vista and don't want to go it alone, fortunately have a broad choice of service providers that can help. These include certified Microsoft partners and firms experienced in providing desktop outsourcing services.

**Testing Mode**

While many companies are still evaluating whether to upgrade to Vista, outsourcing companies are testing the software internally. HP Services, a provider of desktop outsourcing services that will help clients migrate to Vista, has deployed the operating system internally in advance of the delivery date. "We like to have some experience under our belt before we help customers," says Stan Foster, distinguished technologist and resident

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Microsoft expert at HP Services.

"My guess is that the bulk of our customer base will wait rather than have a mass migration," says Foster. "Any large enterprise customer [that tries] a forced migration to Vista will have [difficulties]. It won't be practical or cost effective to do that. Some companies or divisions will go quicker, and then the rest of the company will follow."

"Unisys, another outsourcing provider and a long-time partner of Microsoft, is also testing the new operating system internally to learn everything it can about the software before helping clients with migrations," says Peter Tripp, VP, Strategic Programs Office, Global Outsourcing and Infrastructure Services.

Ekaru, a technology-services company serving the small and medium business market and a certified Microsoft Small Business Specialist, is counseling many of its clients on Vista, including providing advice on if and when to migrate. The firm will help its clients with everything from planning and budgeting to software installation and end-user training.

"Ekaru has been working with advance copies of Vista to learn about its features and those elements of the operating system that are significantly different than previous desktop operating systems from Microsoft," says Ann Westerheim, President, Ekaru.

"We're starting to talk to customers [about Vista] and letting them know what's coming, what the roadmap looks like," says Westerheim. "It's going to be a very big change for companies, primarily because Vista has a different look and feel than previous operating systems."

Some outsourcing firms, such as Getronics, are familiarizing their clients with Vista through Microsoft's Technology Adoption Program. "The idea of these evaluations is to be sort of like a super beta test, so by actually deploying the early releases of the products the customer understands what the product can do and the challenges of deployment," says Lee Nicholls, Senior Technology Advisor, Getronics.

**"ALL OF THE VISTA FEATURES MAY BE GOOD AT SAVING MONEY, BUT UNLESS YOU'RE DEPLOYING WITH BEST PRACTICES YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO GET A RETURN ON INVESTMENT"**

Lee Nicholls,

Senior Technical Advisor Getronics

Nicholls says that the program is also helping Getronics understand the challenges of Vista deployment. "All of the Vista features may be good at saving money, but unless you're deploying with best practices you're never going to get a return on investment from it. It's not what Vista does, it's how you deploy and manage it."

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