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[Free Windows Vista Business and Windows XP SP2 on Parade](#)

Not pirated, not open source, just... free

Free Windows... Not a concept you would expect from Microsoft. With a business strategy focused on proprietary software, the Redmond company is by all means at the opposite technology spectrum from open source and free software. And with the exception of pirated copies of the Windows operating system there is no association between "free" and Windows. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that Microsoft will ever diverge from its current business and development models in the future, by making an open source Windows available for free. Still, end users can find both Windows Vista and Windows XP SP2 for free over at Microsoft, the trick is just to know what you are looking for and, then, how to manage the offerings. And do not make the mistake of thinking that it is a handout, because that is not the case. Just bear with me, and I'll explain as we go along. But at this point, you have to know that both the latest Windows client and its predecessor are up for grabs straight from Microsoft as free downloads. And no, it doesn't sound too good to be true, although there is a catch, obviously. There are a number of factors that together contribute to the free Vista and XP SP2 releases. First off, there was the Internet Explorer 7 release in October 2006. The next step in the evolution of Internet Explorer from IE6 broke the web, but just a tad, mainly because of added CSS support. This happened in particular due to a little something something Microsoft had previously implemented in Internet Explorer 6 in order to ensure compatibility, the all-too-familiar DOCTYPE switch used by web developers, to enable different modes of browser behavior. Because IE6 is virtually a handicapped browser, it took a lot of tweaking on the web developers end to make the same website render properly in Internet Explorer 6 as well as in Firefox, Opera, Safari, etc., part of the work involved the DOCTYPE switch. When IE7 was released it diverged from the model of IE6, just enough to break the webpages that were tailored to the previous release of the browser. It can't really be said that Microsoft made amends, but having its Virtual PC 2007 virtualization solution made available for free, the company did debut an initiative designed to atone for the problems faced by web developers. It essentially started, timidly enough, to offer Windows XP SP2 with Internet Explorer 6 as a virtual hard disk image available for free. The offerings associated with the Internet Explorer Application Compatibility VPC Image download grew over time, adding a copy of XP SP2 plus IE7. Microsoft made a tradition out of the continuous releases of IE Application Compatibility VPC images throughout the past year, and the lineup just keeps getting better and better. And as a matter of fact, it just did with the launch of [Internet Explorer 8 Beta 1](#). Now, with IE8 Microsoft plans to deliver full support for CSS 2.1, but there are also changes coming to DOM, AJAX, as well as support for HTML 5, and the setting of the Standards Mode as the default rendering mode of the browser. In translation... IE8 will break the web. Microsoft is not aiming to reduce the impact that IE8 will have on the websites built exclusively for IE6 and IE7. This is why the company made available the Internet Explorer 8 Beta Readiness Toolkit. With a little preparation from web developers, and with timely adaptation of websites for IE8, the transition to the next-generation of IE will be smooth. But not for all websites. And the largest impact won't be felt by professionals, but by do-it-your-selves and hobbyist web developers, and also on the websites that are no longer actively managed. **But for the Rest There Are New Resources Available** New resources translate to new Internet Explorer Application Compatibility VPC images, now featuring not only Windows XP SP2, but also Windows Vista Business, and not only IE6 and IE7 but also Internet Explorer 8 Beta 1. The images are designed to integrate seamlessly with virtual PC 2007, and to provide the "testing grounds" for websites in IE6, IE7 and IE8. Microsoft is now offering [IE6 VPC.EXE \(435.1 MB\); IE7 VPC.EXE \(434.3 MB\); IE7-VIS1.exe \(700.0 MB\); IE7-VIS2.rar \(700.0 MB\); IE8 VPC.EXE \(438.6 MB\) and IS7-VIS3.rar \(590.5 MB\)](#)). In this manner, web developers (but not only them) can access free, pre-activated versions of Windows XP SP2 with IE6, IE7 and [IE8 Beta 1](#), but also a copy of Windows Vista Business RTM with Internet Explorer 7. All the images are time bombed and set to expire on July 3, 2008. "This image will expire on July 3, 2008. At that time the Operating System will no longer boot, and you will be locked out of the VHD. Please ensure you back up any relevant data before July 3, 2008. The Administrator and IETester passwords are P2ssw0rd . The image was and is up to date as of February 20, 2008," reads a message that accompanies all the virtual

hard disk images. The XP SP2 plus IE6 and IE7 images are nothing new, they have simply been updated. But now there is also a copy of XP SP2 with Internet Explorer 8 Beta 1, as well as one of Vista Business RTM with IE7, offered in as an .EXE and as a .RAR file. **Get Your Virtual PC 2007 While It's Hot!** Virtual PC 2007 is an indispensable tool if you want to take advantage of the Internet Explorer Application Compatibility VPC images. It can be downloaded from [here](#) and the screenshots of detailing the process of setting up a virtual machines have been integrated with this article. All you have to do is create a virtual machine, label it in accordance with your preferences, select a hardware configuration out of the defaults available that is suited for the operating system you want to run, tweak the RAM, and use an existing virtual hard disk. The images you will download from Microsoft contain .VHD (virtual hard disk) files. You don't need to worry about installing the operating system in a virtual machine, or optimizing it for a virtualized environment, or even about the platform's licensing status. It has all been taken care of for you. All you have to do is extract the virtual hard disk and then point the virtual machine to it, and you're ready to roll. **Free Vista and XP SP2**

Considering that you have the necessary amounts of system memory, and in scenarios where you deal with virtualized environments you should go all out with a 64-bit architecture and well over 2 GB of RAM, the sky's the limit to what you can do with the images. Taking into account that the password for the IETester and the default Administrator account for both operating systems is P2ssw0rd, you should have no issues with privileges. At this point in time, you will be able to access all the IE6, IE7 and IE8 application compatibility images via this [link](#). Just go to Downloads and you will be able to grab your own free virtualized copy of Windows Vista Business or Windows XP straight from Microsoft. The downloads all weigh in an excess of 400 MB, so if you don't have a broadband connection, it will be a tad tricky. But just plan ahead and all will be fine. Now, as I have already said, all the VPC images will expire on July 3, 2008. Be sure to wrap whatever work you have by that time and move your data elsewhere. And by mid 2008, get ready for a new set of downloads because the IE Application Compatibility images will be refresh by then. Just more free Vista and XP for you to play with.