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## [The Vista SP1 vs. XP SP3 Smackdown About to Start](#)

*As XP SP3 will hit on April 29*

The Windows Vista vs. Windows XP face-off is far from over. Not only that, but the smackdown of the two operating systems is about to enter into its next stage of evolution with Microsoft launching the latest service packs for both platforms. [Vista Service Pack 1](#) was released to manufacturing on February 4, 2008, and XP SP3 RTM'd on April 21. At this point in time Vista RTM end users have full access to the 36 language versions of SP1 via Windows Update, Microsoft Update, the Download Center, and through Automatic updates. XP SP3 is currently available just to MSDN and TechNet subscribers, but will start being offered for download on WU and the Download Center come April 29, with AU distribution scheduled for June 10. SP1 and SP3 will undoubtedly bring a new facet to the Windows client already fragile equilibrium, with the market divided between Windows XP and Windows Vista. And instead of the inhouse competition between the two products ending with the SP1 and SP3 milestones, Microsoft has managed noting more than to perpetuate the Vista/XP operating system measuring contest. The first signs of the new fuel being poured into the inherent XP SP3 and Vista SP1 comparison, came as early as the end of 2007 when the service packs were still in Beta, with the general tendency [to crucify Vista SP1 and put XP SP3 up on a pedestal](#). The Redmond company felt the negative impact of splitting the market between the two products in the [financial results of the last quarter](#), ending on March 31, 2008. Windows client revenue dropped to \$4 billion from \$5.2 billion in the same quarter of the past year, with operating income also down to \$3 billion from \$4.2 billion in Q3 2007. Vista managed to hit a total of 140 million sold licenses worldwide at the end of March, eroding the market dominance of XP, but not to the level where its predecessor would see its lion share crumbling entirely.

**Windows Vista Delivers [an Unconvincing] Richer, Safer User Experience**"Windows Vista delivers richer, safer user experience" is a statement coming straight from Microsoft. "Stylish, versatile Windows Vista powers a new wave of eye-catching PCs, with Service Pack 1 making consumers' digital experiences more reliable and secure than ever," the Redmond company added. And yet the love for Windows Vista was inconsistent to say the least throughout 2007, and it is bound that will continue to be so even with SP1. "Personal computing has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past six years," Microsoft added. And yet, the vast majority of end users, 73.59% according to statistics from Net Applications, are still focused on XP, an operating system made available at the end of 2001, and already over 6 years old. In Microsoft's perspective, Vista is tailored to perfection to blogging, social networking, digital photography, personal and work-related productivity, multimedia, wireless and additional activities and digital lifestyle scenarios. "Powerful trends demand an operating system designed from the ground up to natively address and integrate the increasingly disparate usages people have for their computers, bring the PC and web together in a seamless continuum, and stay ahead of the latest security threats to people's personal information," the company stated, pointing to Vista as the product fitting this description. And it seems that Microsoft convinced some 140 million end users to jump on the Vista wagon, totaling a market share of 14.02% according to Net Applications. However, the impact of SP1, dropped in mid-March, and just making its way to consumers through the retail and OEM channels, has yet to be felt. At the same time Vista has to fight not only the generalized user perception about its quality, but also market trends such as the selling of unlicensed PCs, the focus of consumers in emerging markets and the struggle of its OEM partners with increasing new PC shipments. "Windows Vista's performance, functionality and security are spurring many consumers to switch to one of the new generation of PCs specifically engineered for it, and Windows Vista is helping drive PC sales. Global PC shipments increased by 14.6 percent in the first quarter of 2008, compared to the same period in 2007, according to IDC, and more than 100 million Windows Vista licenses have been sold since its consumer debut in January 2007. More than 11,000 hardware and software products - from printers to routers to digital cameras - now carry either the "Certified for Windows Vista" or "Works With Windows Vista" logo - an 87 percent increase since July 2005," Microsoft claimed. But in the end, Microsoft admitted that three in 10 people that have test driven Vista do not consider it an improvement over Windows XP. Sure, 70% of respondents in IPSos and NPD surveys did consider Vista a step further compared to XP, but

Microsoft failed to reveal to which extent. Still, that's 30% of users that are going to ride XP out for all its got, and will not make the jump to Vista. "In a poll of 6,000 PC users in the US, China, Britain, Germany and Japan conducted in January that was commissioned by Microsoft, a majority of those that used Windows Vista agreed that it was safer and allowed them to do more with their computers than previous operating systems. The survey also found that more than 85 percent of Windows Vista users who increased their use of advanced features like managing pictures and video, monitoring Internet usage and gaming, agreed that Windows Vista made it easier to perform these tasks," the company added. **All the Love**The end of XP SP3's life is by no means even on the horizon. Microsoft plans to sell the operating system to OEMs for ultra-low-cost PCs until mid 2010 or one year after the availability of Windows 7, whichever comes first. Additionally XP SP3 will be available via System Builders until January 31, 2009. June 30, 2008 will mark the cut-off date for Direct OEM and Retail license availability, but nothing more. Microsoft Chief Executive Officer Steve Ballmer even said that the availability of XP could be extended over June 30 if there will be sufficient demand and feedback from end users and partners. Ballmer added that Microsoft is not receiving consistent input in this context, and that to the contrary, Vista is now the top player on the market. "So, what is really changing on June 30th? Essentially, this means that OEMs and Retailers will not be able to obtain new copies of Windows XP. That's it. System Builders will continue to be able to obtain XP through January 31st, 2009. There is still plenty of support left for Windows XP," revealed [Jared Proudfoot](#), Program Manager, Microsoft Support Lifecycle. And in the end it will all come down to support. In certain scenarios XP is irremediably tied to IT hardware infrastructures, and will remain tied as long as productivity is kept within normal parameters, especially in the case of corporate customers. Neither Windows Vista nor Windows 7 will change this, as software upgrades will be correlated strictly with hardware upgrades, and with Microsoft planning to continue breathing life into XP SP3 long after Windows 7, it will be just that much simpler for users to stick to what they know rather than migrate to Vista SP1, or its successor. "Support for Windows XP will continue, in accordance with the Microsoft Support Lifecycle policy. This means that the Mainstream Support phase will end on April 14, 2009 and the Extended Support phase will end on April 8, 2014. That's at least another 6 years of support remaining for Windows XP! Remember, that Windows XP was launched in 2001 and Microsoft committed to providing a minimum of 10 years of support (5 years of Mainstream Support and 5 years of Extended Support) at the time it was released. In accordance with the policy, when we announced the updated release date of Windows Vista, Microsoft also provided additional 2 years Mainstream Support for Windows XP. Last year, we also announced the addition of an Extended Support phase to the consumer editions of Windows XP," Proudfoot added. The extended support for [XP SP3](#), in combination with the impact of the latest service pack are not the only aspects that will contribute to the operating system retaining a strong install base despite of Windows Vista, SP1 or no SP1. Microsoft's new translucent strategy under which Windows 7 is developed, with all details gagged, is only managing to keep end users in the dark. [Translucency](#) however does not contribute to tone down the perhaps too high expectations consumers are making for the next iteration of Windows. Some are already planning to skip the disappointing Vista and go straight to Windows 7. But so far there is no concrete contour to Windows 7 to justify skipping the Vista step, with the real possibility that the next version of the Windows operating system will not be all that it is expected to be.