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Windows  
Microsoft

## [The eXperience \(XP SP3\)... The Wow \(Vista SP1\)... and the Seventh \(Windows 7\)](#)

*The good, the bad and the...*

Windows XP (Service Pack 3 imminent), Windows Vista (Service Pack 1 just around the corner) and Windows 7, still on the distant horizon, but at the same time becoming increasingly palpable... The good, the bad and the still-to-be-determined. Essentially, the three operating systems mark almost a decade of Microsoft history, starting in 2001 with XP RTM, jumping to 2004 with SP2, then to 2006/2007 with Vista and in the future, an estimated 2009/2010, with Windows 7. There is also a more subtle, underlying evolution to Windows in the past 10 years. Microsoft has shifted its strategy of building Windows, moving from XP codename Whistler and from eXperience to SP2 codename Springboard, then to Vista codename Longhorn and to the Wow, then to Windows version Next codename Vienna. From XP to Windows 7 via Vista, the Redmond company traveled from Whistler, made a short pit stop at the Longhorn watering hole, and moved on to Blackcomb. The Vienna codename for the Windows version to follow Vista indicated the first signs of an oscillation in the Windows development process. One that was complete with the stepping down of Jim Allchin from the role of Co-President, Platforms & Services Division in January 2007, shortly after the consumer launch of Vista, and with Steven Sinofsky taking on the position of Senior Vice President, Windows and Windows Live Engineering Group. **The eXperience**It all started with Whistler. Windows XP is cozy, comfortable. XP is an integral part of the Windows landscape, more than any other version of the Microsoft operating system, at this point in time. With the worldwide install base for Windows flirting aggressively with the 1 billion milestone, XP can largely take almost all the credit. The operating system debuted back in 2001 and climbed to a market share of over 85% just before Vista was shipped. The largest impediment in Vista's way, XP's market share was slowly eroded throughout 2007 as Vista increased its audience. At the end of 2007, according to statistics provided by Net Applications, XP still enjoyed the lion's share of the operating system market with over 76%. But of course that what made a success out of XP was by no means the RTM version of the operating system. XP RTM was just as badly received as Windows Vista and a true security faux pass. The turning point, however, was XP SP2. Back in 2004, Microsoft even offered XP SP2 as an excuse for further postponing Longhorn, saying that it had to shift resources to the service pack, and away from the upcoming Windows operating system. Ahead of his retirement from Microsoft, Jim Allchin looked at XP SP2 as full release of Windows, and by no means just a service pack delivering an incremental upgrade. And Allchin was not far from the truth. XP SP2 turned XP around and made it what it is today, an operating system that can go head to head against Windows Vista and still hold its own. At this point, XP is so deeply rooted in the IT landscape that it will take more than Vista to dislodge it. **eXPiring...**Windows XP is not expiring, no matter how many hundred million Vistas Microsoft throws at it. Without a doubt, XP is on its way out the door. But it is still a long way before Microsoft will be able to boast that XP has left the building. An illustrative example in this context is the fact that we are now at just one week from the moment that would have signaled XP's end. Initially, January 31st, 2008 was marked as the end of availability date for Direct OEM and Retail Licenses. However, at the end of September 2007, Mike Nash, corporate vice president, Windows Product Management announced that the Redmond company would extend the Direct OEM and Retail License availability end date until June 30, 2008 due to customer demand and OEM pressure. It still remains to be seen if Microsoft will cave in yet again in mid 2008 and further prolong offering XP preloaded on OEM machines, or as boxed copies. But OEM and

retail channels aside the XP Starter Edition will survive on emerging markets until June 30, 2010, while System Builders will be able to sell it until January 31, 2009. On top of this, mainstream support will only be retired in April 2009, while extended support will last until 2014. The sole factor that can contribute decisively to the expiration of XP is the hardware and software environment orbiting around the Windows platform that will slowly shift its focus on Vista nudged in the right direction by Microsoft's evangelism efforts. And do not forget the third and final service pack for Windows XP. Officially planned by mid 2008, with more realistic deadlines estimates pointing to February 2008, XP SP3 will serve to breathe additional life into XP. The service pack debuted into testing in mid 2007, and at the end of December of the past year, was made available for the general public. XP users can still access XP SP3 Release Candidate, and an additional 15,000 selected testers can even grab the [XP SP3 Release Candidate Refresh 2 via Microsoft Connect](#) starting this week.

**The Wow** During his last keynote address at the 2008 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, on January 6, Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates applauded an install base of over 100 million for Vista. The latest Windows operating system may not be pushing twice the volume of licenses compared to its predecessor, but it is selling, and selling well. So much in fact that it contributed to increasing Microsoft's revenue for the Client-division by over 70%, in the second quarter of the 2008 Fiscal Year, compared with the same period of the past year. Net Applications puts Vista at a market share of over 10% at the end of December 2007. The \$500 million Wow is gone by now, but Vista is still here and going strong. **Wow-less** In the end, Microsoft jumped too far with the vision of Longhorn, and simply landed too far off with what it delivered in Vista. But the soil is now fertile for the evolution of the latest Windows client. Microsoft started cooking Vista Service Pack 1 back in 2007. In mid December, the Redmond company even made available to the public Vista SP1 Release Candidate. Opening up the testing process of Vista SP1 brought with it the Vista SP1 Refresh, also a public release in early January 2008, and [Vista SP1 Refresh 2 this week](#). There are no more traces of Wow in Vista SP1, but with compatibility, support, reliability and performance problems associated with the debut of the platform largely out of the way, the service pack has a shot of capturing more audience, and to convert more XP users. Microsoft claims that SP1 will drop by the end of the first quarter of 2008, but otherwise all other indications point to February. **The Seventh** No more codenames, no more big expectations, no more transparency... Sinofsky's perfect recipe for Windows 7. Namely a product number, a modest evolution of the Windows operating system, and translucency (which essentially means that Sinofsky will only talk Windows 7 when he's good and ready, not a whisper before that). But there is a lot of anticipation building around Windows 7. Especially now that Microsoft has started shipping the first Milestone of the next Windows operating system. Coming with the promise of a closer integration with Windows Live, with a new core - the MinWin kernel, and with an overhauled graphical user interface, along with the growth of the components fitted into the platform's fabric from Windows Media Center to support for EFI (Extended Firmware Interface), Windows 7 has pushed XP SP3 and Vista SP1 just a little into the background. There are now [leaked screenshots of Windows 7, and even leaked videos of Windows 7](#), both offering previews of Windows 7 Ultimate edition Milestone 1 version 6.1 (Build 6519.1.x86fre.winmain.071220-1525). But this is all that end users are supposed to get. Just a taste of Windows 7. Milestone 1 is time-bombed to expire in May 2008, By this time, the Redmond company will deliver M2. M3 will follow in the third quarter of 2008. The release dates for the Beta, RC and RTM versions have not been set as of yet, but the official launch of Windows 7 is apparently planned for the second half of 2009. With XP SP3 and Vista SP dropping just two years ahead of Windows 7, the real question is in which direction will end users swing. With the proximity of Windows 7, those running XP SP3 will be tempted to stick with what they got. Moving to Vista, SP1 or no SP1 will mean staring in the face Windows 7 beta releases as yearly as the debut of 2009, just a year from now. According to the official Microsoft clock for Windows 7, the operating system will ship 3 years after the release of Vista. But the

actually releases of Vista stretch from November 2006 (the RTM and business launch) until the end of January 2007. In this context, it is a much more plausible scenario that Microsoft will target the 2009 holiday season with Windows 7.