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Windows 7 Boot Logo
Microsoft

[Windows 7 Build 6956 Gallery](#) – 160 Screenshots

Waiting for Windows 7 Beta

[Windows 7 Beta](#) is just around the corner, and yet, nowhere near close enough. But at the same time, Windows 7 pre-Beta Build 6956 is already here. The Build was showcased at the Windows Hardware Engineering conference in China, and subsequently leaked and made available for download both as a [VHD](#) and as an [ISO](#). Windows 7 pre-Beta Build 6801 Mileastone 3, released at the Professional Developers Conference 2008 and WinHEC 2008 US had a similar fate. From 6801 to 6956, the evolution of Windows 7 is indisputable, as the operating system is moving away from Windows Vista and more towards, well, Windows 7. This should be evident in the following Windows 7 Build 6956 gallery featuring no less than 160 screenshots of the operating system.

160 screenshots of Build 6956 of the next iteration of the Windows client offer an ample opportunity to get a taste of what the fully-fledged Beta version of the platform will bring to the table. In [Build 6801](#), Microsoft blocked some of the best features of Windows 7, namely those based on the evolution of the graphical user interface. This is no longer valid in Build 6956. Features like Aero Peek, Aero Snaps, the new Taskbar (the Superbar), Aero Shake and even wallpaper slideshow are now available without having to resort to a hack to dig them from under Microsoft's limitations.

One thing is for sure. The Windows 7-specific feature set of components that were set free in Build 6956 has been available as early as Milestone 3 (Build 6801) in the operating system. Microsoft is in fact not adding much in the jump from M3 to Beta; it is only perfecting the release, taking care of all the details that were apparently considered not ready for the general public at the end of October/the start of November.

Two sides to Windows 7 Build 6956

Still, there are two sides to Windows 7 Build 6956, in accordance with the graphical user interface. Build 6956 will never manage to feel more like a Windows Vista Release 2 than without Aero and the GUI enhancements specific to Windows 7. At this point in the development of Windows 7, users will find that if they are forced to switch Aero off because of inferior machines, or because of the need to squeeze every last drop of performance out of the hardware, Windows 7 will show its "ugly" Vista face. But with Aero fully enabled, Windows 7 is without a doubt the next major version of the Windows client; well, quasi-major, but still.

The feel - minus Aero

Running Windows 7 Build 6956 in a virtual machine with some 1.6 GB of DDR3 and an Intel Core Duo processor at 3 GHz delivers a superior performance compared to Windows Vista. When it comes down to the way the operating system feels - no benchmarking involved, mind you - Windows 7 is superior to Windows Vista, Aero on or off. The actual impression of performance is immensely important, as Microsoft has learned with Windows Vista. While the company claimed that Vista was on par with Windows XP and supported the claims with benchmarking statistics, the actual user experience spoke to the contrary. And truth is that,

even at Build 6956, Windows 7 feels lighter, faster, smoother, compared to Windows Vista.

The first new addition to Windows 7, synonymous with Build 6956, is the new boot screen animation. I managed to include a few screenshots of various stages of the startup process in order to give you an idea of what the new boot process brings to the table, but there is also a [video you can access](#) in this regard. Without Aero, Windows 7 Build 6956 is not much to look at. There is a new, more consistent effect when interacting with the Start Orb, but no Aero Peek, Snaps, no Superbar, and so on and so forth.

Exploring Windows 7 Build 6956 gives the familiar feeling of Windows Vista. In fact, Vista components are waiting for the users around every corner, from the Task Manager to the command prompt, to the Performance Monitor, Remote Assistance, Registry Editor, Resource Monitor, to Windows Media Center and Internet Explorer 8. There are subtle changes here and there, but the fact of the matter is that Windows 7 remains Windows Vista R2.

One aspect that Microsoft will need to tackle before it releases Windows 7 to manufacturing is the content associated with the personalization of the operating system. Windows 7 needs its own brand of wallpapers, as distinct from Windows Vista's as possible. With Build 6956, Windows 7 offers new vistas, but this needs to change. Microsoft will have to take care of this aspect of the visual identity of Windows 7, while making sure that it says 7, and not Vista R2.

The look - plus Aero

An actual installation of Windows 7 will also offer a superior performance to Vista, and I'm also including Service Pack 1 here. No longer sluggish, no longer managing to produce hiccups even on common tasks, no longer hitting speed bumps even as a pre-Beta. With Aero enabled the Windows 7 user experience delivers the evolution Microsoft referenced time and again when it was discussing the development strategy for the next iteration of the Windows client.

Aero Peek, Aero Snaps, Aero Shake, Flip 3D, the Superbar are all available in Build 6956. But speaking of visual identity, what goes for the wallpapers also goes for the screensavers. While not available in virtual machines, the Windows 7 Build 6956 screensavers are the same as in Windows Vista. This aspects needs to be corrected before Windows 7 RTM, while at the same time, Microsoft has to either make the Settings button actually permit users to tweak the screensavers, or remove the thing entirely.

Far enough from Vista

Build 6956 inherently leads to the conclusion that Windows 7 is what Windows Vista should have been from the get go. This is an operating system actually capable of producing a few consistent Wows, unlike its precursor. But still, Windows 7 is just another Vista. So far it looks like Microsoft is right on track to producing a faster, prettier, more usable, more compatible Vista. My best guess is that end users will have to wait for Windows 8 in order

for Windows to get far enough from Vista that it will not qualify as an R3 release, as with Windows 7, the Vista era is not ready to come to an end.