

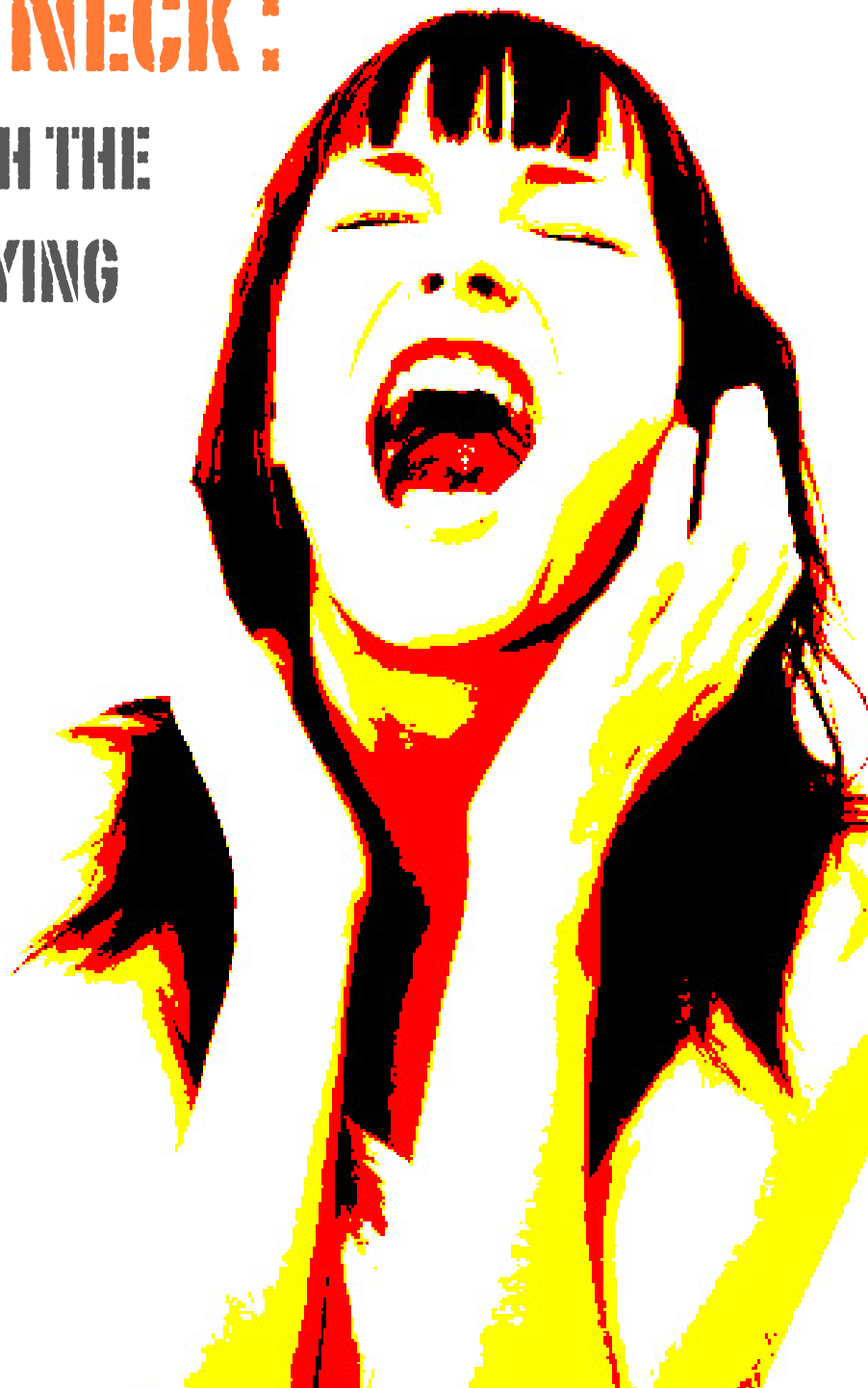
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GUIDEWIRE

june 2007

PAIN IN THE NECK:

**HOW TO COPE WITH THE
STRUGGLES OF BUYING
A NEW PC**



After five long years, the new Windows Vista operating system is finally out

and preloaded on new PC's from every major Windows computer maker. After months of hesitation, you may think that you can now go forth with confidence and buy a new computer. But, think again, it's not that simple.

The following tips apply to mainstream users doing typical tasks, not hard-core gamers or techies.

Rather than trying to upgrade existing models, the average consumer with an aging PC should hold off until new Vista PC's emerge. One reason is because Windows updates are difficult and problematic. However, there are drawbacks to buying a brand new Vista PC.

First of all, Vista is not that much of an improvement from Windows XP. It looks better, the search function is of higher quality and Microsoft claims it has much stronger security. Nevertheless, you still need to deal with add-on security software.

Second, makers of Windows software and hardware have failed miserably to update their products to work smoothly, or at all, with Vista.

So, if you desperately need a new windows PC, be prepared to be underwhelmed

and frustrated by incompatible software and hardware. And if you aren't that eager, you may want to wait another six months or so for the software and hardware to catch up. Also, you might want to wait that long for Microsoft to address some of the bugs in their new system.

Or you could just buy a Mac instead. The Apple iMac is the best desktop computer on the market for mainstream, nontechnical customers. It has stunning hardware and superior built-in software. Mac OS X, its operating system, includes most of the key new features of Vista. And

just in case you do need to run the occasional Windows program, the iMac can run Vista, along with its own operating system.

Apple has delayed the release of its new operating system, Leopard, until October. But, it's certain that any Mac you buy now will upgrade to it smoothly, so don't worry. Also, the Mac is still close to 100% free of the security problems that cause additional grief to the Windows PC user.

An Apple Macintosh is the better choice,

however, if you must opt for a Windows PC instead of a Mac, here is some advice.

Vista Versions

Home Basic is the stripped down version of Vista that will be on the cheapest PC's. It lacks the new user interface, though. To get the full Vista experience, you'll need a more expensive computer that comes with Home Premium. It has more media features and would be a better fit for the average customer.

A different version of system, Vista Business, may be the version that you need if your company recommends it. It is without some of the media features included in the Home versions, but it can connect to some types of company networks that the Home versions cannot.



If you want a PC that has all of the features included in the other versions, you will have to spend quite a bit for the most costly version of Vista, Ultimate. Want to avoid Vista altogether? You may be able to find a new PC with Windows XP, though it will not be as secure as the machines with Vista.

Memory

Don't listen to what Microsoft says about it, one gigabyte of RAM is needed for Home Basic and two gigabytes for all other versions of Vista.

Video

You will probably need a separate graphics card with dedicated video memory for PC's with Vista Home Premium, Business or Ultimate. Some integrated graphics systems will also work, but they will drain some of the main memory through a scheme called shared memory.

Processor

You can use any current Intel or AMD processor in a new brand-name PC with Home Basic. However, a "dual core" processor, such as Intel's

Core 2 Duo or AMD's Athlon 64 X2, is strongly recommended for the other versions. These processors are the equivalent of two chips in one. But, even if your processor can handle 64-bit software, most users won't find the capability useful.

Hard Drive

80 or 100 gigabytes should be adequate if you are not going to be working with videos, music or photos. At least 250 gigabytes is required if you are interested in such media.

Disks

A DVD is your best bet. Wait until the the war between the high-definition disk drive is over.

Junky Software

Almost all Windows PCs are filled with useless trial versions of programs, called "craplets". For a small fee, some retail stores can remove these programs for you.

Price

If you spend about \$400 you can get bargain, brand-name desktop with Home Basic and a slow processor. But you will have to spend at least \$800 in order to get a versatile desktop with two gigabytes of memory, discrete video, a large hard disk and a dual-core processor, not including the monitor.

If you are *still* determined to go with a PC instead of a Mac, try not to buy more or less machine than you need. ✦

