

## VONTRONICS E-NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2008

Welcome to a new year, everyone!

May everyone's new year bring a fresh start and a good outlook. I'm looking forward to visiting with my grandson (and his parents!) this week. I'll let you know what trouble he and I get into!

Remember, as always, if you don't want to be sent these e-newsletters, please check at the bottom of this e-mail to find out how to easily be taken off the list for future e-mailings. And if you are receiving more than one copy, please reply back and let me know your primary e-mail address.

*And if you could help me out by forwarding this e-newsletter to a friend that might enjoy it, I'd appreciate it! Thanks.*

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### Product Reviews

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#### VISTA SERVICE PACK 1

Microsoft is preparing to release the Windows Vista Service Pack 1 early this year. This is the long-anticipated "bug-fix" that many of us have been waiting for before deciding to use Vista. It's in final testing stage now.

Service Pack 1 is designed to improve the stability and reliability of Vista. Unfortunately, service packs for Windows can sometimes cause problems. Many of you experienced some problems when Service pack 1 and 2 came out for Windows XP. I'd recommend watching for additional news here and with other sources before taking the Vista plunge yet.

If you're already running Vista, you have to decide now whether to let Microsoft automatically install Service Pack 1 for Vista, or you can block it for now, watching for more news on any additional problems it may be causing. Microsoft has a tool that will help you block the installation of Vista Service Pack 1. It blocks the installation via Windows Update for 12 months.

<http://tinyurl.com/2uryvq>

But you can still install the service pack manually, if you choose.

<http://tinyurl.com/395esz>

#### CHARTING THE DIFFERENCES

Microsoft has made it very confusing to know which version of Vista to select. Without even getting into the 32-bit or 64-bit versions of each of these, this chart may help to show what comes with each "flavor". The price estimates are based on retail versions of either the unarade or the full version of each. If there is enough interest in what

each of these features provide, I'll detail them in a future e-newsletter.

Feature	Home Basic	Home Premium	Business	Ultin
<b>How much does it cost (<i>upgrade or full</i>)</b>	<b>\$100 / \$200</b>	<b>\$160 / \$240</b>	<b>\$200 / \$300</b>	<b>\$260 /</b>
Windows Defender Anti-spyware	\$	\$	\$	\$
Windows Firewall	\$	\$	\$	\$
Instant Search	\$	\$	\$	\$
Internet Explorer 7	\$	\$	\$	\$
Aero experience with Windows 3D Flip		\$	\$	\$
Windows Mobility Center and Tablet PC support		\$	\$	\$
Windows Meeting Space		\$	\$	\$
Windows Media Center		\$		\$
Connect to XBox 360 and other gadgets with Windows Media Center Extenders		\$		\$
Windows DVD Maker		\$		\$
Windows Movie Maker in High Definition			\$	\$
Advanced Business backup features			\$	\$
Scheduled Backup		\$	\$	\$
Complete PC Backup and Restore			\$	\$
Business Networking and Remote Desktop			\$	\$
Windows BitLocker Drive Encryption				\$

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*Tech Tips*

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**GO PHISH**

Phishing is one of the tactics that hackers employ to steal your identify, bank account info, etc. Typically, they set up a fake website that mimics a legitimate one, then send out spam email alerting you to some dire problem that scams you into connecting to their fake website and entering your private information. Many banks, Paypal, eBay, and credit card companies have been used in this way. It's called "phishing" because you are being "baited" into being hooked into giving away your valuable info. The "ph" was substituted for "f" to make it easier to know the difference between this on-line scamming method and more traditional uses of the word.

Carnegie-Mellon University has provided an on-line quiz to teach us how to recognize the various phishing tactics and to raise your knowledge and awareness. I suggest everyone give it a try.

[http://cups.cs.cmu.edu/antiphishing\\_phil/quiz/index.html](http://cups.cs.cmu.edu/antiphishing_phil/quiz/index.html)

## TEST YOUR KIDS AND GRANDKIDS

Here's an online quiz to see how well your kids (or grandkids) can determine what is safe and not safe on MySpace.com and other social websites. Have them take it with you so you both can learn together.

<http://www.komando.com/myspace>

## WHERE ART THOU XP?

Most of you, including myself, are perfectly satisfied with Windows XP and have no interest in upgrading to Vista. Others have found that if you buy a new computer at a store, even if you're replacing an aging or failed computer, you'll have trouble finding any new computers preloaded with Windows XP. Some have even thought of buying a Vista computer and then installing XP on it, but that requires time, effort and money.

It seems especially hard to find notebooks with Windows XP, which is strange because portables are more likely to have performance problems running Vista. Dell, HP and Toshiba each have certain models available that you can pre-order with Windows XP installed, but proceed slowly through the ordering process to make sure you are getting Windows XP plus the features that you need for your new computer. A rule-of-thumb now is to make sure that any new computer you buy has at least the minimum hardware requirements to run Windows Vista so you can upgrade to it later if you wish.

Dell allows you to order XP on some of their laptop models but not all, and HP does likewise. Toshiba will also allow you to order Satellite notebooks with XP and so do some other vendors. Unfortunately, most of the laptops you find on retail shelves these days have Vista on them. You may have to order from the hardware vendor to get XP, but for most low end portables, it's usually worth it.

<http://www.dell.com>

<http://www.hp.com/sbso/index.html>

<http://www.toshibadirect.com/td/b2c/laptops.to?coid=-26368>

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*Freebies*

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## GETTING DEEP

This short video shows how the Hubble Space Telescope has shown us the farthest we've ever seen into the universe. The opening music track, appropriately, is from Pink Floyd, a rock group closely associated in the past with "star" shows in planetariums.

## KNOW YOUR MALWARE

**MALWARE** is any software designed to infiltrate or damage a computer system without the user's informed consent. It is a portmanteau of the words "malicious" and "software". Some types of malware disable software firewalls and anti-virus software, and/or reduce browser security settings, thus opening the system to further opportunistic infections. The cumulative effect, and the interactions between various malware components, causes the symptoms commonly reported by many users: a computer, which slows to a crawl, overwhelmed by the many parasitic processes running on it. Almost all of the following definitions fall under the general term "malware". Use this guide to learn the differences between them:

**VIRUS** is a computer program that usually infects/corrupts another file and can copy itself and infect a computer without permission or knowledge of the user. It must be transported from one computer to another to infect it, such as over a network or the Internet, or by carrying it on a removable medium such as a floppy disk, CD, or USB drive. Most viruses are programmed to damage the computer by corrupting programs, deleting files, or reformatting the hard disk. Others are not designed to do any damage, but simply replicate themselves and perhaps make their presence known by presenting text, video, or audio messages.

**WORM** is a self-replicating computer program that uses a network or the Internet to send copies of itself to other computers and it will usually do so without any user intervention. Unlike a virus, it does not need to attach itself to an existing program. Worms almost always cause harm to the network, if only by consuming bandwidth, whereas viruses almost always corrupt or modify files on a targeted computer.

**TROJAN** is a piece of software which appears to perform a certain action but in fact performs another. This action, usually encoded in a hidden payload, may or may not be acutely malicious, but trojans are notorious for their use in the installation of backdoor programs. A trojan does not propagate by self-replication but relies heavily on the exploitation of end-users. Many notices on the Internet that promise to remove a dire dangerous condition that has been found on your computer are very likely to be trojans which will instead install another form of malware.

**SPYWARE** is installed surreptitiously on a computer to intercept or take partial control over the user's interaction with the computer, without the user's informed consent. Typical tactics include delivery of unsolicited pop-up advertisements; theft of personal information (including financial information such as credit card numbers); monitoring of Web-browsing activity for marketing purposes; or routing of HTTP requests to advertising sites.

**ADWARE** presents the user with advertising, usually as a means of supporting its

development and disbursement costs. Most free or low-cost software includes advertising in one form or another, but these are usually easy to recognize and ignore, and are generally accepted at the same level as TV commercials... as a necessary part of the use of that software. Adware, in itself, is not a problem, though the ads can be distracting and, of course, anything running on your computer whether you directly benefit from it or not will slow it down. Some adware products will act like spyware in that they trace your internet habits and serve up ads that are more likely to gain your attention.

**KEYLOGGERS**, also known as "keystroke loggers", are installed surreptitiously as a means of recording all keyboard activity on an infected computer. The information, kept as logs, can be sent at intervals to the host, which garners valuable information, such as passwords, account numbers, etc. There are legitimate uses of keyloggers also, including by parents installing "cyber-nanny" type control programs for their children's protection, by employers installing similar means to insure that their employees are complying with company computer-use policies, and by law-enforcement to gather information needed for a pending prosecution.

**GREYWARE** is software, usually beneficial, but cleverly bundled with other less beneficial malware. The legitimate software manufacturers that release greyware usually benefits monetarily for including it. Most greyware will allow you to NOT install the addition malware, but only if you are careful or know how to avoid it. Examples include such notable beneficial free software as Adobe Acrobat Reader (will install Google toolbar if not discouraged), Adobe Flash Player (also tries to install Google toolbar), and Java internet programming interface (also installs Google toolbar without specific exclusion measures).

## KEEP IT SAFE OUT THERE

As always, don't forget to keep your Windows updates current and your computer protected from malware. There are many free, yet excellent programs available so there is no excuse not to stay protected. However, there are many more free programs which are harmful, that will instead of protecting your system, actually infect it. Choose from this list I've provided and you should have no problems of that sort. Most of these free programs are for individual home use, not commercial / business use, but I've noted those restrictions, plus the Windows versions each is compatible with. Here's the latest list of excellent, but free, security programs that I recommend:

**ANTI-VIRUS:** ( *fights viruses, worms & trojans*)

AVG 7.5 Free: (*home only, Win98-Vista*)

<http://tinyurl.com/2neexk>

AVast! 4 Home Edition: (*home only, Win95-Vista, annual free renewal*)

[http://www.avast.com/eng/avast\\_4\\_home.html](http://www.avast.com/eng/avast_4_home.html)

Comodo 2: (*home or business, XP/2000 only*)

<http://antivirus.comodo.com/>

Clam-Win .91: *(home or business, Win98-XP, manual scanner only)*  
<http://www.clamwin.com/>

**ANTI-SPYWARE:** *(fights spyware & adware)*

SpyBot 1.5: *(home or business, Win95-Vista, manual scanner only)*  
<http://www.safer-networking.org/en/mirrors/index.html>

Threatfire 3: *(home or business, WinXP-Vista, manual scanner only)*  
<http://www.threatfire.com/download/>

Microsoft Windows Defender: *(home or business, WinXP-2003, requires validation)*  
<http://tinyurl.com/c9p2f>

Webroot SpySweeper: *(home only, Win2000-Vista, 30-day free trial)*  
<http://tinyurl.com/2bp9xa>

**FIREWALL:** *(fights keyloggers and hacking)*

Your Router: almost all routers have a hardware firewall built-in, the best type!

ZoneAlarm Free: *(home only, Win2000-Vista)*  
<http://tinyurl.com/3yhkyk>

Comodo Firewall Pro: *(home or business, Win2000-XP)*  
<http://tinyurl.com/2o2p6d>

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For those of you not aware of it, I've recently installed a major upgrade on my website. All of my previous e-newsletters, plus many extras, are available to you at [www.familycomputerusa.com](http://www.familycomputerusa.com). Thanks for checking!

I don't get any compensation from the commercial links I include in my e-newsletters. It's merely a pleasure for me to find and share these tidbits with you. If you have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to reply. I try to answer all e-mails within 24 hours.

Thanks for reading. Now you're one of the family!

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