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From the Nov. 2006 Issue

If your own dog has ever bitten you, you can understand how I feel about the AMD 64-bit dual-core processors and Windows XP Professional 64-bit. The bit part is me.

That would only be mildly anecdotal if Microsoft were not about to push the entire computing industry toward 64-bit operating systems. Because even though the launch of the new Vista operating system is only weeks away, there are already disturbing signs that no one other than the chip makers and Redmond are very enthusiastic about it. I took the plunge earlier this year, upgrading my chipset, motherboard and operating system for a newer, better, faster computing experience in 64-bit land. Eight months into this experience, my counsel to accounting firms is this: Wait. Maybe for a long, long time.

Actually, this is reminiscent of the last major overhaul, when Microsoft took its operating system to the Pentium level and launched the 32-bit Windows 95 operating system to replace the 16-bit DOS systems. Those old enough to have been around for that remember the following about the launch of Windows 95:

- **Not much of anyone supported 32-bit computing.** Certainly not enough to make it worth upgrading their stuff to run on the 32-bit platform. And if they did, it was in order to sell brand-new hardware like video cards and memory chips, not the one to two year-old hardware that people were actually using.
- **Accounting software vendors, in particular, were slow to jump in.** After all, why upgrade your software to 32-bit processing when it might destroy a tax season (as it did for a few) or cost you long-term customers

(as it also did for a few). In fact, many smaller accounting firms kept their

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Already, the drumbeat surrounding 64-bit Vista is starting to sound more like a tap dance. Microsoft has announced that the “Home” version will remain 32-bit, assuring that no company in its right mind will develop mass-market software for 64-bits (with the possible exception of game companies, which have been on 64-bits for several years already due to X-Box and PlayStation). With the launch of Vista only a short time away, there are no major accounting software developers who have announced definitive plans to support the 64-bit side of the platform. Déjà vu all over again.

I actually like the 64-bit platform. My take on Windows XP Professional 64-bit is that it is a bit faster and seems to be more stable. On the other hand, there are no drivers for my laser printer, and likely never will be. My mouse doesn't work. I can't download the pictures from my year-old Sony digital camera to the hard drive. Bunches of smaller applications simply crash upon installation. When this column was introduced 12 years ago, it was with the idea that guys like me would experiment with new hardware and software — on the “Bleeding Edge” — so you wouldn't have to. Based on that philosophy, here are my basic rules for upgrading to the new 64-bit platform:

- Take the equipment upgrade as you need it. There is no need to rush into dual, triple or quad-core processing until there is a solid reason to do it, no matter what Intel and AMD say.
- Wait until your mission-critical software has been upgraded to a 64-bit operating system before you even think about it. Then, wait a while longer.
- Before you upgrade, check to make sure that every single piece of hardware has drivers for the new operating system. If they do not, replace them or wait a little longer.
- Forget the nonsense of the bridged, dual graphics cards. You still don't need more than 256MB tops on your graphics card to run accounting applications.

And if you ever do, invest in a single 512MB card. Walk away from the more expensive

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Mr. McClure is a consultant and widely published writer on technology issues.

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