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latest desktop/laptop operating system, Windows 7. And most accounting professionals are asking, "What's the big deal?" Like no other profession, tax and accounting practitioners are known for their frugality and, consequently, the analysis will be long and deep regarding a move to Windows 7 for the sake of having the latest and greatest. If you want to know what may support a BUSINESS DECISION to make the move to Windows 7, then read on.

ROI (return on investment)

Let's talk numbers, something all accountants seem to understand. Recently, the City of Miami piloted Windows 7 with the following results:

"The city expects an estimated ROI of 151% and IRR of 78% with payback in less than 15 months based on direct IT labor savings alone. Benefits include direct IT cost savings estimated at \$89 per PC per year, made possible by automated deployment in addition to security and desktop management tools. When power savings are included, the business case is even more compelling, with an estimated net present value (NPV) of \$271 per PC during a 3-year cash-flow period and a payback period of less than 9 months."

Yes, Windows 7 is 'less taxing' on the hardware and ultimately consumes fewer kilowatts. In addition to the direct cost savings, Windows 7 is estimated to save city PC users approximately 18 hours per user per year by helping them access data more quickly and securely from any location, and provide tools that help them solve their own basic issues.

So to summarize, justifying the cost of Windows 7 comes from three main areas: IT labor savings, power savings and direct cost (user labor) savings. Simply

stated, Windows 7 delivers a smoother setup and end-user experience in addition

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System Restore functionality such that the entire system can be 'rolled back' to a period that was acceptable to the end user, essentially undoing that regretful installation.

IT Labor Savings — Problem Steps Recorder

Typically, the most complicated aspect of troubleshooting is reproducing the conditions that demonstrate a problem, especially if the affected user is working remotely or communicating by telephone. If the support professional can't reproduce a user's problem, they can't easily diagnose and resolve it. Windows 7's solution to this impasse is the Problem Steps Recorder.

End users simply run the recorder to log the steps taken when a reproducible problem occurs. Click Start Record, reproduce the problem, enter comments where appropriate, click Stop Record, and then send the recording via e-mail to the support professional. Another great use of this tool has nothing to do with troubleshooting; it's great for capturing screenshots when building graphical steps to accomplishing a task for instructional purposes. As with Vista, you can quickly find just about any utility or file by typing the name in the Start Search field. If you have access to a copy of Windows 7, see if you can find this tool using Start Search. Hint: You'll have to click the Start button and type the words Problem Steps.

Power Savings — Group Policy

Many computers, including most desktop PCs and some laptops, are typically left powered-on 24/7. Windows 7 provides new power options, which can be centrally managed by Group Policy. Now, those with responsibility for configuring desktop and laptop computers can take a proactive role in managing the electricity consumed by PCs. Coupled with hardware advances like Intel's vPro technologies, IT staff can use Group Policies to apply power plans that power-down machines ... and still be able to wake them remotely for management tasks. This will

reduce power consumption by nearly 75 percent and directly drive bottom-line

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located by clicking on the start button and typing, in this case, action. Up comes the Action Center, and there you'll find the Troubleshooting (and Recovery – see previous paragraph) utilities.

Windows 7 includes 20 built-in Troubleshooting Packs that address more than 100 root causes of problems. These were included based on the top 10 categories of Microsoft support calls.

Direct Cost Savings — DirectAccess

Mobile computers are a challenge for IT departments because they can only be managed when they are connected to the internal network. Users who often work away from the main office or who travel for extended periods of time might not connect to the internal network for weeks or months. As a result, these mobile computers don't download updated Group Policy settings, critical updates or anti-malware definitions.

Traditionally, remote users connect to internal network resources with a Virtual Private Network (VPN). However, using a VPN can be cumbersome for users because it requires several steps, and several seconds (or even minutes), for authentication to occur. Windows 7, together with Windows Server 2008 R2, introduces DirectAccess,

a new solution that enables users to have the same experience working remotely as they would if they were working in the office. Taking advantage of technologies such as IPv6 and IPSec, DirectAccess provides remote computers with automatic access to the internal network across the Internet without connecting to a Virtual Private Network (VPN).

Direct Cost Savings — Enforced Data Encryption

We would all agree that we are doing business in a very litigious environment. Privacy legislation has certainly increased the risks associated with doing

business as professional accountants. Vista introduced a full-drive encryption

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be located.”

There was more, but you can imagine the feelings of vulnerability I felt and the feelings of embarrassment felt by the Institute for compromising my private information. One of my worst nightmares is the thought that I would have to send such a letter to my clients. As in the AICPA incident, the breach was caused by an employee violating Institute policy.

With the enhanced Bit-Locker technologies, in combination with Windows Server 2008 R2, Group Policies can now require any portable media device when connected to any machine on the network to be encrypted before any data can be transferred to it. This is a “sleep at night” benefit of the new technologies.

Further you can restrict certain users and/or machines that can be used to transfer data to portable media. Many a firm has been affected by disgruntled staff members who take client files (feeling entitled to do so) without authorization of firm owners.

Regardless of how you justify your decision to move your computing environment to the new server and desktop operating systems, a compelling business case can be made for the costs associated with making the move.

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