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If you haven't been sleeping, you've undoubtedly heard about Microsoft's 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

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experience

in addition to drawing fewer physical resources to get the same work done.

Now let's go through some of the technologies that make this all happen:

IT Labor Savings — System Restore

Let's face it, we're not perfect. Sometimes we install things on our machine that look good, but once installed have the exact opposite result. In the computer support business, we refer to this phenomenon as the issue residing between the keyboard and the chair. Windows 7 has improved and enhanced the 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

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... 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 savings of more than \$50 per PC per year. Also, the plans can gracefully turn certain components off when not in use.

Direct Cost Savings — Troubleshooting Packs

These little gems significantly reduce help desk involvement, but more importantly allow end users to get back to work quickly. In an attempt to keep the technical jargon to a minimum, these troubleshooter wizards are power scripts designed to diagnose and solve basic common issues. Windows 7 comes with a new Control Panel feature referred to as the Action Center. Using Start Search (this is 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

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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 utility referred to as Bit-Locker. Windows 7 enhanced and expanded that utility with Bit-Locker to go, providing full-drive encryption of any USB drive (and so-called thumb drives) in addition to attached hard disks. The real issue is depending on end users to apply firm policies related to transporting sensitive information on encrypted media. I received a letter from the AICPA back in 2006, which read as follows: “We are contacting you about an incident that affects you. A restored AICPA computer hard drive containing certain member information being transported to the Institute cannot presently 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

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