

Windows XP Professional Review

Review by Rob Campion

I. Product Information

Microsoft windows XP Professional

Windows XP is a product of Microsoft Corporation, Redmond Washington. Windows XP can be obtained from leading office supplies or on the World Wide Web. Prices vary from \$135.00 to \$299.00 for the full CD.

II Intro

For years, Microsoft has had two series of Windows versions: the Windows Me/9x series (which includes 95, 98, 98 Second Edition; and Millennium Edition, or Me) for individual users, and the NT series (Windows NT and 2000) for corporate users and network servers. For some time, Microsoft has been trying to merge the two (slightly incompatible) series, so that everyone could run more or less the same version of Windows. With each new Windows release, Microsoft promised that the *next* release would be the one that combines these two strains of Windows.

Microsoft has finally done it. Windows XP is the upgrade to both series of Windows, Me/9x and 2000/NT. Windows XP (also known by its prerelease code name, *Whistler*) does away with the legacy architecture of the Windows 9x series. Windows 95 and its successors were based on DOS, the pre-Windows, non-graphical operating system that PCs started with. Windows XP removes the underlying DOS environment for increased reliability, and it uses the Windows NT/2000 file system for better security. Windows XP is based on Windows 2000 and combines the technical core of NT/2000 with the ease-of-use of Windows 98 and Me. Because of its business-oriented lineage, Windows XP has some great new capabilities for Windows Me/9x users, including password-protected user accounts and system management programs. But Windows XP also adds people-friendly features that were lacking in Windows NT and 2000, along with a completely redesigned (and unique-looking) screen design called *Luna*. Initially, Windows XP comes in two versions: Home Edition (for home use) and Professional (for small-office and workstation use). These two versions are intended for workstations--that is, computers that people sit in front of and use directly. At first look, Windows XP looks very different from its predecessors--the new Luna interface can be a startling change, with its simplified desktop and Start menu. Windows is still under there, though; you can switch the Windows desktop back to a more familiar style. But the Luna interface isn't the most important new feature.

III Requirements

Windows XP requires the following computer hardware:

- A Pentium II, Pentium III, Celeron, compatible, or better CPU running at a speed of at least 300 MHz.
- At least 64MB of RAM memory (although Microsoft recommends at least 128MB--it's not reliable with only 64MB).
- A hard disk with at least 2GB total space with at least 650MB free, depending on which options you choose to install. (You may need more for temporary files.)
- A CD-ROM or DVD drive from which to install Windows and other software.
- A monitor, keyboard, and mouse or other pointing device.
- If you plan to listen to sounds played by Windows and other programs, you need a sound board and speakers attached to your computer. To participate in voice or video chats, you need a microphone or digital video camera, too.
- If you plan to use your computer to connect to the Internet, you need a modem, be it DSL, Cable or dial up.

Windows XP also removed a few programs that came with some earlier Windows versions. Windows XP doesn't come with FrontPage Express (an HTML editor for creating Web pages), Microsoft Chat (an Internet Relay Chat program for chatting over the Internet), or Active Movie (which has been replaced by Movie Maker and Windows Media Player 8).

IV Installation

Based on previous experiences upgrading to newer versions of Windows, I thought upgrading to Windows XP would be painful; I had no difficulty in the install. I did have a notation regarding my BIOS, but went ahead with the install. I chose to install the OS on the fat system, as opposed to NTFS. This makes it simpler for me to function, as I have become accustomed to doing. I did however have an extra machine standing by, just in case I had to have a driver before the install was complete.

V. Features

- The C D Wizard built into Windows Explorer makes it easy to copy your files (including music and graphics files) onto CDs.
- Backup is back! Microsoft used to provide a backup program with earlier versions of Windows, but recent versions have left it. I am glad to see that it has been restored, as running backups regularly is vital to keeping your files safe. If you use Windows XP Home Edition, you'll need to install it separately from the Windows XP CD-ROM.
- Internet Explorer {IE} version 6.0 is an upgrade to Microsoft's powerful Web browser, and Outlook Express 6.0 is the newest version of Microsoft's e-mail and newsgroup program.
- Fast user switching & Password –protected User Accounts make it convenient to create and use a separate user account for each person who uses a single computer. If you assign passwords to the accounts, users can have a private, password-protected folder for their files. Fast User Switching lets several people stay logged on at the same time, with a new keystroke--WINDOWS-L--to switch from one user to another. If you use the NTFS disk format, you can password-protect files and folders, too.
- Windows Messenger challenges AOL Instant Messenger and other instant-messaging programs.
- Windows Media Player 8 is a step up from the previous version, with DVD support, audio CD creation, and even automatic downloading of audio CD cover art from the Internet.
- Photo Printing & Web Publishing are built in: when Windows encounters a folder that contains graphics files, it offers wizards that can upload your pictures to a Web site or send them off to a photo-printing service. You can see your photos as a filmstrip or slideshow, too.
- The Files & Settings Transfer Wizard helps you move your stuff from one computer to another, including your documents and settings.
- The Internet Connection Firewall protects your computer, from outside access.
- Web Folders enable you to work with files and folders on FTP and Web servers using Windows Explorer.
- The Last Known Good Configuration option lets you recover from Windows crashes by returning to a Windows configuration that worked.

- Remote Assistance enables you to ask a friend, coworker, or a support professional to take over your computer via the Internet and fix a software problem.
- Product Activation requires you to "activate" Windows over the Internet or phone within a grace period, or the program stops functioning. Activation doesn't require personal information from you (it's not the same as registration) and is designed to stop software piracy. This has raised a lot of concern for some individuals. Many teckies are changing their systems constantly. You are allowed three changes to components before you have to call and have the system reactivated. Corporate issues are exempt from P.A.

VI. Documentation

There is a small manual that accompanies the package {29 pg.}. There is also good help available in the help section of the operating system. However the system must be functional before one can access the help. I bought a manual for XP. Mine contained 1070 pages. For myself, I personally would like to see less packaging, and a better manual.

VII. Product Support

Microsoft has expanded the Help and Support Center (HSC) introduced with Windows Me. An integrated Tools Center lets you search for utilities to support your computer. The Tools Center is extensible, so as Windows XP support grows, equipment manufacturers will be able to update the Tools Center to add their own utilities and support directly to the HSC.

Windows XP's System Restore feature tracks system changes such as device-driver updates, and it will restore system settings to a previous state should a newly installed device driver fail. The Windows XP version of this tool improves on the Windows Me version by supporting the highly secure New Technology File System and ensures that Group Policies are applied to the System Restore configuration settings, giving administrators more control. Support from M.S. was not needed. In the event that that help is necessary the call to M.S. is a toll call.

Conclusion

This OS isn't just about flashy extras: Those with greater technical expertise will find that Windows XP includes some key fixes in its more technical areas as well. Networking has been made a lot easier. It was nice to see that Microsoft has included Compatibility Mode, which lets older applications function on the new OS. When running in Compatibility Mode, Windows XP emulates a Windows 9x, 2000, or NT 4.0 environment, depending on the intended driver base of the application. You can save Compatibility Mode settings so that your applications will start in the correct mode every time. Another nice feature is Device Driver Rollback, which reinstalls a known working device driver if the new driver doesn't work. Automatic Update premieres in this version of Windows. This utility scans your system, then goes to the Web to look for driver updates and software patches, and even ensures that Windows XP has been successfully installed. You have complete control over this process and can accept or reject the update, or postpone an update until another time. If you accept, downloading occurs in the background on a low-priority thread so that your applications are not affected by the update service.

DOS is gone!!! Not hardly, I was still able to run some of my old favorite utilities. All in all this entire version is better! "Better than the rest" It has some very nice refinements, and is so much more stable than its predecessors. But before you go out and buy a copy of Win XP do your homework first. Read the compatibility requirements, that way you won't be disappointed. Once you have it up and running you most certainly won't be disappointed.