Windows Vista Migration Position Paper

Information Systems and Technology's (IS&T) Workplace Technology Services will continue to evaluate the Windows Vista Enterprise (Vista) operating system to prepare for campus-wide migration. Due to several major issues related to the migration costs, hardware upgrades, security issues and legacy application compatibility, IS&T recommends that Vista migration be delayed until Microsoft resolves these outstanding issues. Microsoft has become sensitive to customers' concerns with Vista and as a result has released a new Windows XP Service Pack 3 update. In addition, Microsoft will extend support into 2014, which justifies our decision to postpone the migration project.

To run Vista, Microsoft recommends an 800 MHz processor, 512 MB of RAM and a 35 GB hard drive; however, to realistically support Vista, IS&T recommends a minimum 2 GHz dual-core CPU for desktop systems and a 1.5 GHz processor for notebooks and 2 GB of memory. After surveying the campus using the iCommand Discovery asset management tool, we discovered approximately one third of the campus computers will need to be upgraded prior to deploying Vista. This equates to approximately 2,000 computer workstations.

Users should also be prepared for the additional security alerts they may encounter, since with a Vista operating system, alerts will "pop up" whenever a security or policy enforcement change occurs. This increased exposure could lead to user-click fatigue. Additionally, many of these warnings provide little help when system administrations try to resolve problems. For example, permission prompts currently state that an application is doing something it should not without explaining exactly what is wrong and Legacy software may encounter problems with permissions when trying to update supporting DDL files. It is hoped that the revised event log and monitoring-notification system will help with problem diagnosis. Microsoft's BitLocker technology is a component of Vista's security utilities that provides whole-disk encryption; however it may conflict with our adoption of PGP encryption. William Monahan stated that PGP encryption can be centrally managed by their console resources; however, once a drive is encrypted using BitLocker, management over that workstation is no longer an option and they would have no access to the drive for investigative or security purposes.

Although Microsoft Vista includes many additional features including Aero, Ready Boost, Ready Drive and native support for TabletPC technology, one major issue is its lack of full compatibility with applications and hardware drivers. Incompatible applications used by Georgia State end users include parts of SPSS, SAS, PeopleSoft Spectrum and Banner. As a result, Microsoft released VirtualPC which allows users to run these, and other similar applications, using a virtualized XP environment built in Vista; however, campus administrators will now be forced to support two operating systems on one computer, which doubles the requirements to support, patch, and secure a workstation. Until third-party vendors resolve these conflicts with Microsoft Vista, users are urged to continue to use Microsoft XP.

Overall, it is in the opinion of many campus administrators that although there are many new features to Microsoft Vista, these features do not offer a compelling argument to migrate to Vista and that Microsoft XP continues to be the best viable option. Many college administrators share IS&T's concerns with Microsoft Vista and have decided to either delay or cancel migration to Vista. IS&T will continue to test Microsoft Vista with the hope that the recently released Service Pack 1 for Vista addresses some of these outstanding issues.