Windows 8 Review

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Introduction

It's almost here. In fact you may be reading this after it officially launches on October 26th. You may have heard some things already, or may be completely in the dark as to what's going on with this new Operating System. Let's start there.

Windows 8 is definitely the most radical change in the Windows operating system since Windows 95. For better or worse, that's what it is.

The main, radical difference is the removal of the "start" menu, a tool which I and many users have come to love. This has been replaced by the Windows "Metro" interface. (Insert: Metro Picture).

Like it or not, there is good reason in Microsoft's attempt to push this interface. The goal is to create a uniform experience across both mobile and desktop devices. The idea is to have your tablet function in the same way as your cell phone, laptop or desktop.

This also means your standard PC will need to have a touch interface in order to fully utilize the new design. Many new computers will be coming out with touch-interfaces to accommodate Windows 8.

It may be a winning strategy, or it may blow up in their face.

Microsoft has thus far been practically absent in the mobile computing industry. All current devices run Android or iOS. There are no tablets running the Windows mobile operating system, and very few "windows 7" smart phones (not to be confused with Windows 7 computers).

On a personal note, I once owned a windows mobile phone but ditched it for a much better Android phone. Microsoft's complete disinterest in supporting my phone or pushing the technology turned me off. I wasn't the only one. This lack to support mobile technology has put Microsoft in a tough spot as so much of the future of computing is based in this arena. They have A LOT of catch up to do.

With Windows 8, I'd say it's safe to say Microsoft is putting the chips on the table.

So it's important to understand why these changes are there. We can't praise or beat it up without first understanding the purpose behind the changes. It isn't arbitrary.

Most importantly understand this: as human beings, we are resistant to change. We become comfortable with the way something works, and become agitated when it no longer functions the same way. However without change, we get no progress (which isn't to say regression

isn't a possibility too!). For example the "ribbon" in Office 2007 and above was a change met with some major resistance and others strongly supporting it. In the end, it's important to have an adjustment period before we can truly say it's better or worse. So the "knee-jerk" reaction to Windows 8, may not be entirely justified. It may prove to be something that after 3-6 months of use, we decide we like better. As of right now, I'm not a fan of the new interface, but this same truth applies to me as well!

The Good

Often overlooked are the good aspects that are delivered by Windows 8. Most reviews out there have majorly negative review of Windows 8 (and frankly for good reason), but they often lack to point out any of the good parts to the new OS.

- Faster boot times and greater overall performance.
    - Part of this is due to GPU offloading of work that was done by the CPU. In essence, your computer has multiple processors including the GPU (Graphical processing unit). GPU's have become quite powerful and thus it makes sense to take advantage of that power to render things that were once done by the CPU.
- Operating System enhancements
    - Ability to double click to open ISO files. In the past, a third party utility was needed to open ISO files. An ISO file is a "CD Image", basically a CD contained in single file… a "virtual CD".
    - Better Windows Explorer abilities.
        - Windows Explorer is what we use to view "My Computer", or our files inside of the computer. The new Windows Explorer has a ribbon design much like Office, which provides a bunch of additional functionality. Perhaps not a bunch of additional functionality, maybe it's better to say "easier to access" functionality.
    - Improved Task Manager
        - A critical tool for techies, and what should be a useful took to non-techies alike, the task manager can show you everything that's happening in your computer.
        - Cleaner layout to better represent the more powerful multi-computer processing abilities.
        - Startup Manager – allows you to easily disable things from startup. It even tells you the impact of the process on startup. This can allow people to more easily optimize their computer's performance over the years of usage.
    - Refresh and Reset
        - These two tools allow you to restore a computer to its factory state or a fresh state (without your programs but with your files) in a few easy clicks. This can help if you've caught a virus or corruption from updates.
    - Improved Multi-Monitor control
        - Trust me – multi-monitors are awesome and not expensive or super-NASA-like as they once were. I couldn't work without them anymore. In recognition of this, Windows 8 has better multi-monitor support.
        - Support for task bar across multiple monitors.
- Strong Cloud-Tied presence
    - Windows 8 has been designed in the age of "high-speed" internet. In recognition of this, many "cloud based" (internet-based) features are supported in windows 8.
    - Synchronization of files and settings.
        - Your windows 8 login can be tied to Microsoft's servers. By doing this your login password is the same as your Microsoft account password (such as Hotmail, outlook, MSN etc.). If you log into your Windows 8 tablet, or another computer, the files and settings can be loaded automatically onto that machine as well. Change your password on one device, and it's changed on all of them.
    - Sky Drive: Microsoft's response to Google Drive and DropBox. It's the same in concept as DropBox, except more integrated into the OS. You can save your files

directly to your “sky-drive” which stays synchronized across all your Windows 8, SkyDrive enabled devices. So if you put a picture of cousin “IT” into your sky drive, it will be on your tablet and phone automatically.
    - Microsoft Store: Microsoft’s response to Google’s Play Store and Apples App Store. This is particularly nice because so, so very often I will ask customers for a CD which they no longer have. I then have to explain to them there is no way to reload the software without their CD and/or product key. With the Microsoft Store, things purchased through this route can be saved online, in the “cloud.” If you need to reload Microsoft Office – no problem! Your product key and office are both hanging around in the Office Store for whenever you need them. Lost CD’s are no longer a problem (so long as you purchased the item from the Microsoft Store).
    - Music and movies purchased can also be stored on your sky drives.
- Clean modern looking interface.
    - The new Windows 8 Interface is sleek, clean and uncluttered. It looks nice.
    - Live tiles on the start screen update you constantly. Facebook, twitter, email and weather information is always there on your start screen. You can get a glimpse of things without clicking or opening the apps.
- Universal Ecosystem.
    - As mentioned before, Microsoft is trying to create their own “ecosystem.” This is necessary to compete (or catch up) with Apple and Google. If successful, a complete robust ecosystem can integrate and tie things together in a very nice fashion.
    - Less compatibility issues within an ecosystem. Things play together much better when comparing Apples to Apples, or Microsofts to Microsofts. Apple T.V. works nice with iTunes and the XBOX works nicely with a Windows PC. (Of course this doesn’t bode well for competition if you are committed to an Ecosystem, something I never liked about Apple's strategy).

The Bad

Most all of the bad can be surmised in a short paragraph. Windows 8 feels like it abandons traditional desktop users. The new Metro interface isn’t the most efficient design for a traditional desktop. It’s designed for touch, and swipe gestures, something standard desktops don’t do. Of course the response to this is to make it so the desktops can do that! But I think there are a couple fundamental problems in that approach. First, I’m lazy and like things to be easy. Reaching across my desk to my screen to launch apps isn’t going to work for me. I could pull the monitors closer, but then I lose a lot of desk space. Second, this will spur a whole market of “all-in-one” systems, similar to the iMacs. The major problem with that is cost of repair is a lot more than your standard desktop and monitor. I’ve also noticed that it seems like the failure rate is higher for these devices.

Desktop users are forced into giving up a lot in order to accommodate the other devices. Desktop users aren’t even given the option to switch to the traditional desktop and start menu. The old start-menu from Windows 7 is simply gone.

A lot of the items have moved around significantly. I had to Google "How to turn off my computer and how to open tabs in windows 8’s internet explorer." If the computer guy is having to Google this stuff, I can only imagine what’s going to happen for everyone else.

Some things seem to be moved to very odd places, instead of logical extensions as has happened in the past. For example, you go to “settings” to shut down your computer. (…… wth?) If you want to open a new tab, right click to open a drop down that will then allow you to open a new tab. Really? That’s not going to work as I always have more than 5 tabs open. You have to right click every time you want to switch between tabs! Are you kidding me?!

The music app loaded from metro is unintuitive, obnoxious and not for me. It’s pretty, but it consumes the entire screen. I want to open a song or drag an mp3 into the play list and let it rock. Good luck with the metro music app.

The “right click” in the Metro start page opens at the bottom of the screen. Normally when you right click, you get a context menu that pops up right where you right clicked. Instead you must

right click, then go down to the bottom, then probably back to where you were before in Metro. That's a lot MORE work, not less work as you would expect with "newer, better" stuff.

The Metro Interface doesn't let you view applications sorted by folder view. It's basically you get every app on your computer (which again requires a right click before you can view all apps), or nothing.

It is nice that in metro you can simply type the name of the program you want and lunch it fairly quickly. There, I said something nice about metro! I can scratch that off my to-do list.

Another review described Windows 8's "Metro" and "Desktop" modes as schizophrenic. I think that's a very apt description. For example if you have a webpage open in IE for Metro, then switch to desktop mode, and open IE, you will find you are starting fresh. Switch back to Metro, and the page is still there. It's as if it's two operating systems in one machine.

Just to repeat once again, the touch interface for a desktop is somewhat silly in my opinion. I don't want to reach for my computer screen over and over again. That just seems like more work, not less.

Tablets and phones are great for some purposes, but multi-tasking is not one of those strengths. That's where desktops excel and mobile computing falls short. Designing Windows 8's interface so strongly around mobile computing I feel greatly inhibits the ability of multi-tasking. As a user who typically has 6+ apps all running at once, this is a big no-go for me.

Conclusion

In the end, most all of my issues (as well as the majority of other people out there) with windows 8 stems from Microsoft forcing desktop users to use the Metro interface, removing the start menu/button and neglecting us old but faithful Windows users.

If Microsoft simply put the start menu back, and allowed desktop users to NOT use the Metro interface, I would be a much happier camper. But as of right now, that's not going to happen.

Perhaps Microsoft is right, and in time, I will see the wisdom in their methods. As I said initially, people are resistant to change. But logic tells me I won't be any more of a fan in a year than I am now.

I understand the goal is to make things as similar as possible for the average user when going from a desktop to a tablet. It's also a good marketing strategy if it convinces people to buy Microsoft mobile computing products such as tablets and phones because of the familiarity with the product (from the Desktop world). But I feel a bit hung out to dry.

I will be loading Windows 8 on my laptop only because as a computer person I must be knowledgeable on the topic. But my main desktop computer won't be seeing Windows 8 any time soon, unless they cave to my requests.

I would recommend against Windows 8 for my customers. When you purchase a computer, you may not have a choice, or may have to pay extra for Windows 7. I would suggest even paying a little extra for Windows 7 at least for the first 6 months to year. Let someone else work out the bugs.



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