



Psst, Wanna Save \$140 on Windows Vista?

Time-consuming workaround lets users install less-expensive upgrade version of Windows Vista.

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Microsoft's licensing terms and antipiracy measures for Windows started getting more complicated after it launched [Windows Genuine Advantage](#) two years ago, much to the chagrin of confused customers.

But with Vista, Microsoft seems to have confused itself, creating a loophole for customers with a do-it-yourself bent to save as much as \$140 per copy of Vista.

On Friday, Microsoft confirmed reports circulating on the Internet since the beginning of the month that customers can successfully install an upgrade version of Vista on a computer without Windows XP or 2000 already on it, through a bit of installation ledgerdemain.

Here's how the "clean install" trick works according to ars technica:

1. Boot with the Windows Vista upgrade DVD and begin the full installation process.
2. Do not enter the product key when prompted, but continue on.
3. Choose to do a clean install of Vista, that is, fully wiping your hard drive.
4. After you're done, boot into the still-unactivated copy of Vista.
5. Run Windows Vista setup again, from inside Vista.
6. Select upgrade, and enter your upgrade key.
7. Install Vista a second time.

Microsoft Aware of Workaround

Essentially, Vista is fooled into upgrading itself, thus allowing customers to avoid the need to have a prior copy of Windows XP or 2000 installed on that computer. While time-consuming because of the double installation, advocates say this workaround not only allows users to do a fresh install of Vista, which they say will run more reliably, but can save some customers money. The amount depends on which flavor of Vista a customer gets.

The difference between the full and upgrade price of Vista Home Basic is \$100 (\$199 vs. \$99). For Vista Home Premium, it is \$80 (\$239 vs. \$159). For Vista Business, it is also \$100 (\$299 vs. \$199). For Vista Ultimate, it is \$140 (\$399 vs. \$259).

A Microsoft spokeswoman said in an e-mail that the company is "well aware of the workaround," which she added "violates the terms of use agreed to when they purchased the upgrade version of Windows Vista. As such, we believe only a very small percentage of people will take the time to implement this workaround, and we encourage all customers to follow our official guidelines for upgrading to Windows Vista instead."

Workaround Irrelevant for Most Users

Microsoft is right: for most businesses as well as consumers, the workaround will prove to be irrelevant. Why? Because most larger corporations buy Vista in volume licenses, which are usually discounted off the list price. Also, the time involved in having IT staff manually installing Vista twice on each PC would more than outweigh any potential cost savings.

For consumers and small businesses, the vast majority will get Vista pre-installed when they buy a new PC. Buying a new PC without an operating system on it and then installing an upgrade version of Vista might actually cost more than buying a new Vista PC because of the low price Microsoft charges OEMs to pre-install Vista, along with other discounts that it offers.

Indeed, the type of person most likely to benefit from this workaround are power users and hobbyists who own multiple computers running Windows as well as Linux and Mac OS X. One concrete scenario would be someone with a used PC that's just one or two years old running either Linux or OS X who decides to convert it to Vista and buys the upgrade version of the OS to do so.

Such users may argue that they are such good customers of Microsoft that they should be allowed to save a little bit of money when Microsoft goofs, like when a retailer is forced to honor a misadvertised price.

But Microsoft remains officially adamant. The spokeswoman noted that customers buying and installing an upgrade version of Vista onto one PC also forfeit the right to use XP on another PC, unless they own more than one full retail copy of XP.

"This is part of the end user license agreement the customer consents to by purchasing a retail upgrade version. We believe it strikes a fair balance for our customers, since upgrade versions allow them to purchase Windows Vista at significantly reduced prices," wrote the spokeswoman. Only customers who pay for full retail versions of Vista "maintain the right to install their previous versions of Windows."

