

Easy Upgrade

My wife is not a power user. For years she could check email (using the icon with the label "Email"). If she wanted to create a document in Word, the kids would help. But she's getting better. She can create her own Word documents, print them, even find things via Google. Since she's not much of a power user, her last upgrade was to a single core Pentium desktop with 1GB RAM and a CRT monitor, running Windows XP. It was never a fast computer, but it kept up with her needs. And we protected it by not allowing family members to install new software on it, so we minimized the amount of plaque that might have built up on it.

Over the last year it has gone from slow to glacial in speed. Even Lorraine noticed how slow it was, although she was reluctant to complain (I know a wife that doesn't complain, what a deal).

Normally my solution to this kind of slowing would be to reformat the hard drive, reinstall everything and possibly add more RAM to speed things up.

This computer is old enough that it uses plain DDR memory, versus the DDR3 memory used by "modern" computers. What that means is even 1GB of additional RAM would cost about ten times what the same amount of DDR3 memory would, simply because for all practical purposes it is out of production and the supply is getting low. And the computer can only accommodate 2GB RAM total, but to do that would require replacing the both 512 MB SIMMs with 1 GB SIMMs, not inexpensive.

While I was debating if it was worth the cost, one of my on-line stores sent me an email ad for a \$249 (after rebates) kit. It had an AMD quad core processor, **8 GB RAM**, and the usual peripherals. It wasn't going to cost a whole lot more than the memory upgrade and would offer a significant performance boost (maybe enough for the next 5 years).

So I got it for my wife for Valentine's Day. Nothing says I love you like hardware.

When it arrived it took about an hour to assemble. Unlike my daughter's "kit," which came with no instructions on how to assemble it and ultimately we discovered by accident we needed to plug a 12 pin connector into an 8 pin socket to make it work, this kit had an annotated picture of the motherboard, which was enough to know where all the various cables fit.

Next was installing a copy of Windows 7 Ultimate I had collected at some Microsoft event. That was routine, selecting the 64 bit version installation option because of the amount of RAM memory in this inexpensive computer.

Now I have a new computer running Windows 7 Ultimate 64 bit and an old computer running Windows XP 32 bit. That's quite a jump.

Traditionally I would remove the hard drive from the old computer, mount it in an external USB case and transfer as many files as I could directly.

But I'd still have to reinstall all the software since it was installed on a 32 bit OS and the new computer is a 64 bit OS. While you can legally move Microsoft Office off an old computer to a new one, it almost always requires a conversation with the thick accent employees of the Indian outsourcing company Microsoft uses to activate a product code more than once.

Instead, I went for the easy way. I used a copy of PCmover from Laplink Software (<http://www.laplink.com>) I had gotten a while back when I wasn't sure if I'd ever need to use it.

I am impressed. I installed it on her old computer and on the new computer. Both were hooked up to the our network via our old CAT3 Ethernet wiring (it was installed in 1989 and was state of the art back then). Old computer was in the basement (still doing its thing), new computer was in the family room (watching TV while building computers and installing software makes it go better).

You start the migration on the new computer, which might seem counter intuitive, but basically it sets the computer up to receive from the old computer and took about 2 minutes.

I walked downstairs to the basement and started the migration on the old computer. After a scan of all that was installed, I was given the option to pick what to migrate. I deselected a couple of drivers and a program I knew were not going to be compatible with Windows 7 (one was a Windows 3 program running in Window XP's compatibility box). This part of the process took maybe 10-15 minutes and would have gone faster except her computer is glacially slow (the reason for the upgrade).

I hit migrate and the process started. After about 5 minutes the migrate process had enough information to estimate it would be about 2 hours to complete the migration so we went out to dinner. When we came back the estimate was a little optimistic but within a half hour the migration was complete.

A quick reboot of the new computer and the new computer was very similar to the old one. I say very similar because I would have expected the wallpaper to have moved. It may have, but I had forgotten that going to the new Windows 7 Aero interface disables your old wallpaper settings. And Lorraine likes the new nature theme pictures, so we didn't replace that.

The only other "gotcha" I noticed was that the shortcuts on the start menu on the old computer hadn't migrated to the new computer. Not sure if I didn't get an option set right, or what happened, but it took about 2 minutes to set those up again. About a week later we realized that Adobe Acrobat Reader hadn't made the migration, but again a quick download and that fixed it.

But instead of all the time it would take to download, install, and configure software over on the new machine, it was a snap. I launched Thunderbird and her emails and settings were intact, just like she had never changed computers. Microsoft Office even had some documents in the recent documents list!

The last step was unplugging her old computer, plugging her new computer in its place (we upgraded to an LCD monitor at the same time), and starting it up.

The difference is the new computer is snappy, even with the Windows 7 Aero interface (known to be a resource hog) running. My wife is happy with the new computer--always a good thing at Valentine's Day time.

I am impressed how easy PCmover made the migration. I am tempted to use it to help with my semi-annual plaque rebuilding on my other desktops.

Now if anyone can help with the 8 hours Microsoft Windows 7 Ultimate spent downloading updates, installing them, and rebooting the new computer over and over...

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