

Tips, Tricks and Advice from your local “IT Guru”

This month I want to talk to you, as promised, about Windows 8. By the time you are reading this Windows 8 should have been launched and be available. This means all the major hardware manufacturers will take the opportunity to release some nice new PC's, hopefully taking advantage of the swishy new tile interface by incorporating touch screens. It should also mean that there will be some bargains floating around if you don't want the latest and greatest system, as companies try to shift existing stock.

Although Windows 8 has lots of improvements hidden deep inside, the single biggest difference is the screen that you see on start-up. Instead of the standard Windows desktop we are all used to, with a noticeable 'Start' button and icons, you are now presented with a screen of several multi-coloured tiles (if you have seen a Windows Phone 7 device or a modern xBox360, you will know what I mean.) Imagine a grid of different sized and coloured squares that represent applications, each able to be clicked and moved around like an old sliding puzzle, and you'll get the idea. The whole interface is really designed for the next generation of touch devices. Microsoft is banking a lot on tablets becoming the predominant computing device in the next few years, and is trying to make sure they have an operating system that, if not completely compatible across all its platforms, at least looks similar on each one. The idea is that most people only use a few applications at a time: perhaps an email client, a web browser, and a word processor. Each of these applications will have a nice big tile that you can click on to launch the application full screen, do your work, and exit back to the start screen ready for the next task. Anyone who has seen an iPad or an iPhone in action will get the idea. You can still get to the old Desktop (it's actually a tile on the start screen), but Microsoft is trying to steer you away from doing things that way. For new users it should make life a lot simpler, as long as you are happy to do things Microsoft's way! But for existing users, this is the biggest change to Windows since Windows 95 was released, and I can see it causing a few problems whilst they get used to it.

The problem is, if you have lots of applications installed then they all appear on the start screen, so you end up doing an awful lot of side scrolling to find the one that you want. This is fine on a touch screen, but with a mouse it becomes a bit of a drag... literally! You can just start typing the name of an application or document, and Windows will show you a list of everything with that name for you to click on, but it seems cumbersome to me. If you want to view two applications side by side, say your email and a web page, well good luck with that! Even shutting the PC down presents a challenge the first time you try. At the moment, Windows 8 is trying to work with legacy systems and upcoming new hardware (and Microsoft is to be applauded for giving us this degree of backward compatibility) and the two do not really mix. I'm sure in a few years, with new hardware, this will all seem obvious and intuitive, but at the moment it does appear to be a bit of a mismatch of ideas and metaphors.

As to whether you should upgrade your existing system, my advice would be no. From now on, if you buy a new system you will get Windows 8 and will just have to get used to it. But, if you have an existing system running Windows 7 or XP, then I can see no reason to go to the expense and trouble of upgrading. I would wait until you need a new computer, and get one that takes advantage of all the new features.

If you have any questions or anything you would like me to cover in this column, email me at look@4-11consultants.co.uk

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