

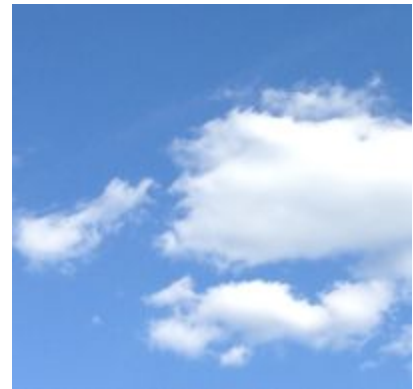
Using A New Windows 8.1 Machine With Two Clouds

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A new machine

Recently my two work computers, a Windows 7 desktop machine with 6 GB of RAM and a 2 GB RAM netbook running Ubuntu Linux, both died. After a scan of my pocketbook and some quick online research I replaced them with a 4 GB RAM Asus notebook PC, model X200M, with an 11.6 inch touchscreen running Windows 8.1.



Overall I'm very pleased with purchase. The machine is no speed demon but it's very portable whenever I'm not at my desk and plugged into a 23 inch monitor. I like the portability as I move around a lot. Using it for the past few weeks for the most part has been a positive experience but there are a few points I like to discuss in case others find themselves in a similar situation.

For the most part I am enjoying Windows 8.1 and the touchscreen. Configuring the Start menu with its tiles was straightforward, installing my Office 365 subscription was easy, as was downloading and installing Chrome, Firefox, and other standard applications.

Applications that take advantage of the Windows 8.1 interface work like a charm. Even touch enabled Gmail is easy to use. I find it a no-brainer to go back and forth between using the touchscreen or my wireless mouse.

I am running into trouble in two areas.

Same old desktop

The first is that I find myself constantly switching back-and-forth between the tile-based Windows 8.1 "start" page and the more traditional "desktop" view that basically appears like warmed over view of Windows 7. For example, touching the "file explorer" or "desktop" tiles on the Start page

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takes me to a file management view that looks and feels a lot like good old Windows 7. Getting back to the tile based Start page requires a touch of either a screen-based icon in the lower left-hand corner or the physical Windows button; touching the "ESC" key, which I'm accustomed to use to "back out" of something, doesn't seem to do anything.

I have not experimented a lot with Internet Explorer as I'm accustomed to using Chrome or Firefox as browsers; the few times I've used IE I was put off by the ads but I should probably give it more of a chance.

In summary, even though I like the Windows 8.1 interface and its touchscreen features, I find myself working most of the time in what basically looks and feels like Windows 7. I'm a bit disappointed by that. Bottom line, though, is that I've been able to become quite productive very quickly with this very portable little machine and, given its cost less than \$350, I like that very much!

Where's my file?

The second issue I ran up against is a bit more serious and has less to do with Windows 8.1 than with adjusting to life in today's cloud.

I'm a dedicated Google Drive user and have been for several years. Its features and functionality adjust well to my needs as an independent consultant and I find myself to be dependent on its ability to synchronize files with my local Windows machine. That ability to synchronize files via Google carries over to Windows 8.1 so the experience has been a smooth transition with this new machine as I can get a Google Drive files from my PC or from my iPhone.

Problem is, Windows 8.1 and Office 365 are very well integrated, as in "default settings" integrated, with Microsoft's cloud-based OneDrive service. While it might be unfair to characterize that as a "problem" as I really do like OneDrive, I do find myself wanting to figure out how best to use OneDrive alongside Google Drive. Right now that's an issue as I'm occasionally finding myself a bit confused about where my files actually are.

When I create a document using Word, for example, I can store it locally, in Google Drive, or in OneDrive. That has become a bit confusing, so I'm having to rethink my strategy about file management, given that I'm working with my friend Michael Kaplan on a SharePoint based project management service called SoftPMO that takes advantage of many native Microsoft cloud-based services. I've also been working with Balefire and Socrata on "open data" services that rely on Microsoft's cloud-based Azure service, so I'm professionally motivated to take advantage of what Microsoft has to offer.

All of this is not intended to take away from the capabilities of this little machine but is a reminder that we have entered a very complex computing landscape where, if you do not have an affiliation with an organization that is in a position to specify an official computing and file sharing architecture and infrastructure, things can get complicated. I don't really enjoy having to think twice about where my files are especially since, to some extent, file location is linked to application functionality, as anyone who has ever seriously engaged in manipulating complex .docx files with Google tools will tell you.

Other possibilities

But I really do like this little Asus machine. For the money I think it's a superb value. The issues

I've raised above have been seriously thinking about two additional possibilities:

1. Chromebooks. I can see the advantage of the circumscribed functionality they offer. Whether or not Google has the wherewithal to manage their evolution in the long run in a way that pleases both geeks and normal folks I would question, plus they lack integration with Office 365 which I find I really enjoy using.
2. Apple. If I had had the cash I would have gone for a MacBook Pro. Apple might also be positioned to develop a powerful machine that does a better job of integrating cloud, touchscreen, and cross-platform support, especially now that Apple and IBM are working together.

That's where I am now. I'll check back again in a couple months to see how things are going.

Related reading:

- [How Documents Are Evolving](#)
- [Harsh Realities of Windows 7, "Standalone" Devices, and Cloud Computing](#)
- [Thoughts About Cloud Based File Sharing, or, "Take My Files - Please!"](#)
- [Using Ubuntu Linux Instead of a Windows 8 Upgrade](#)
- [The Fundamental Problem with Windows 8: One Non-User's Perspective](#)