Miscellany 40: A Critique of the New Microsoft Vista Operating System

Commentary on recent news, reading and events of personal interest.

Contents

A Critique of the New Microsoft Vista Operating System

I had not been planning to buy a new microcomputer until, a few weeks ago, my two-year-old Averatec 6200 (1.8 GHz processor, 512 megabytes (MB) of random access memory (RAM), 60 gigabyte (GB) hard drive) started giving me some problems (it was overheating and cutting off sometimes, and the Internet access was slow). I have another microcomputer – an HP Pavilion zv6000 (1.99 GHz processor, 512 MB of RAM, and an 80-MB hard drive), which I bought about a year ago – but it is used by my wife and I really need two fully functional computers for the sake of reliability. So I checked the newspaper ads, and Best Buy was offering an HP with the new Vista operating system (released at the end of January), so I decided to take a look at it.

It was a very good buy – an HP Pavilion dv6233se, for just $699. It has a 1.60 GHz processor, 1,028 megabytes of random access memory and a 120-gigabyte hard drive – and the new Microsoft Vista operating system ("Home" edition). The regular price was $899, and the sale price was $699 – a good reduction. It is not quite as "fast" as my two older computers, but it has twice the RAM and hard-drive space, and it can copy dual-layer DVDs. I also noticed that the price of computers having the XP operating system had dropped a lot – many for $450, and one (a Toshiba) as low as $350. So I proceeded to the store and purchased the computer.

Little did I know, but I was in for a wild ride.

Connecting to the Internet

I took the computer home and set it up. My other computers accessed the Internet via an Alcatel SpeedTouch high-speed ("broadband") modem, through AT&T/BellSouth ADSL broadband. I have used that modem since about 2001, when I returned from working in Botswana. Unfortunately, the software "driver" for that modem does not work with the Vista operating system. I visited the Alcatel website to download a new driver, and was routed to a "Thompson" website. Evidently Alcatel has gone out of business. Thompson evidently bought them out, but their link to Alcatel products (e.g., for driver upgrades) simply sends you back to the defunct Alcatel website.

So, unable to connect my new Vista-operating-system to my broadband modem, I called AT&T/BellSouth (BellSouth took over AT&T in December, and has renamed the firm as AT&T). They told me that I would have to buy a new modem, but their DSL installation software was not yet ready for Vista, and so I would have to install the new modem by speaking with someone

from technical support. That was fine. The new modem, a "Netopia," cost $75, which was billed to my telephone account. It arrived the next day, and a technical representative led me through the steps to connect it to my XP computer (my "old" HP). Once the modem was installed to work with the XP computer, I was told that I would then be able to access it from the new Vista computer.

There was, however, one slight problem. Since my two computers are "backups" for each other, I keep them connected all of the time using an unshielded twisted-pair (UTP) "crossover" cable, connected to the RJ-45 communication ports (the so-called "Ethernet" ports). I suppose that I could have done this via an "ad-hoc" wireless connection, but I have been keeping them connected via cable for so many years that I never bothered to do it any other way (e.g., using a hub and Ethernet cables, or a wireless hub). An alternative for keeping the computers up-to-date is to copy recent files from one computer to a hard drive (or "flash drive" / memory stick), and then download these files to the other computer. That method works fine, but using the cable obviates the need to connect and reconnect the hard drive to the two different computers.

Years ago, I used to connect my computers using either serial cabling or parallel cabling ("crossover" cables), and communicate using "Laplink" software. At some point, RJ-45 "network" ports were included on microcomputers, and Microsoft included the ability to communicate peer-to-peer between these ports. This could be done, for example, with the Windows 98 and Windows XP operating systems (by establishing a "local connection" in the control panel's networking / communication software). There was then no need to purchase the Laplink software or cables. Once people got used to communicating over twisted-pair cabling through the RJ-45 ports, and Laplink was driven out of business (I assume, since I never see Laplink systems for sale any longer), however, Microsoft withdrew the functionality from the system, including it only in the "professional" version of the operating system.

(Microsoft has a history of taking full advantage of its monopoly in the microcomputer operating system business. I once purchased, for example, the Visio graphics software package. This package was so useful for making diagrams that Microsoft purchased the company and included the Visio software in its software repertoire. When it released the next version of it operating system, however, it introduced a feature that prevented you from using the original Visio software, purchased before Microsoft had purchased the Visio company. The total value of my Visio package was destroyed by Microsoft. To use Visio, I had to pay a couple of hundred dollars to purchase the new Microsoft version. This was not necessary. It was not fair. It was motivated by strong greed. The world needs only one microcomputer operating system, and I have no problem with Microsoft's having a near-monopoly in this area (Apple and Linux are distant seconds in this field). But it is irritating to me when it uses its monopoly position to destroy the value of products that I have purchased, with perpetual license, before it took over the company.)

Up through the Windows 98 operating system (and perhaps the ME and 2000 systems – those operating systems were so bad that I rarely used them), you could set up a "peer-to-peer" network using a cable (a serial (RS-232) crossover cable, a parallel (Centronics) crossover cable, or twisted pair ("Ethernet") cables) between two computers, or a hub (concentrator, router) for connecting three or more computers. This approach works fine for a small number of computers, such as two or three or four in a home or small office. For large networks, the "peer-to-peer" system does not work well (since all traffic is routed to all computers), and it is better to use a "client-server" system (in which messages have addresses, and are routed to their specific destinations). A client-server system would be massive overkill, however, for a home or small office environment.

Microsoft evidently did not like to see people having such a powerful ability as setting up a peer-to-peer network, or even connecting two computers via a twisted-pair "crossover" cable (with RJ-45 connectors to the RJ-45 jacks now available on all microcomputers), however, and so, with the introduction of the XP operating system, it removed this ability from the operating system. It did so by introducing two versions of the operating system – a "home" version that did not support peer-to-peer networking, and a "professional" version that did support networking (either peer-to-peer or client-server). You could buy the home version for about $100, but the full version cost about $300. The irritating thing for people such as I who have been using microcomputers for many years is that the ability to communicate via cable (serial or parallel initially, and twisted-pair later on) has been available since the dawn of the microcomputer era (1974), and it is not friendly to require customers to pay an extra $200 dollars to have a very basic capability that has been there forever.

There was a problem with the new Netopia modem. I could connect it to my old HP/XP computer using either a USB cable or an "Ethernet" cable (twisted-pair cable with RJ-45 connectors – I realize that "Ethernet" is a communication protocol, not a cable type, but most nontechnical people now refer to twisted-pair cabling as "Ethernet" cabling), but it could be connected to the new HP/Vista computer only via an Ethernet cable – either connected directly to the modem or connected to the Internet through the old HP/XP computer. In either case, however, I could not use the Ethernet cable to communicate directly between the computers (RJ-45 port to RJ-45 port) to transfer files. That is evidently considered "networking" by Microsoft, and is not allowed by the Vista operating system on the new HP computer.

So what to do? It appeared that I could either upgrade to the full ("professional") Vista operating system, or I could purchase a wireless hub. A Cisco Systems "Linksys" hub ("Wireless-G 2.4 GHz 802.11g Broadband Router"), which could be used to connect four computers (via Ethernet cables or wireless) cost $69 at Best Buy, and so I decided to do that. To set it up, it was necessary to contact AT&T once again. The setup took about an hour over the phone, but worked fine. I could now communicate with the Netopia modem from any of my three computers (the Averatec, the old HP/XP, and the new HP/Vista). (By the way, the setup was done on the old HP computer with the XP operating system, not on the new HP with the Vista operating system. Once the wireless router was installed on the old XP machine, however, the new Vista computer could access the wireless signal (and every other wireless signal in my neighborhood).)

My Internet-access problem was solved, and without the use of a cable, and so I proceeded to determine whether I could now connect my old HP/XP computer to my new HP/Vista computer via the Ethernet crossover cable. I cannot. Although the old HP/XP computer has just the "home edition" XP operating system, it can "see" other computers on the network, but the new HP/Vista computer, with the "home edition" operating system, can see only itself. As a result, I am forced to keep my computers synchronized by backing up and downloading from an external hard drive or flash drive (memory stick). I tried setting up an "ad hoc" wireless network, but this requires giving each of my computers a fixed IP address, and the Netopia modem / Linksys hub setup requires "dynamic host configuration protocol" (DHCP) to automatically set the IP address. Having to change the transmission protocol each time I want to communicate between computers, and then back again for the Internet access to work, is a major "pain" – it is easier to use the external hard drive. In its quest for greed, Microsoft has abolished the ability for two computers to communicate easily, unless several hundred dollars extra is spent on the "full" operating system.

(Serial ports (DB-9 jacks) are still included on microcomputers, and so it may still be possible to connect two microcomputers together over these ports. I will check this out, if I can find my old RS-232 crossover cables (Laplink serial cables).)

So, at this point, in order to accommodate the Vista operating system, I have now spent $75 for a new high-speed modem and $69 for a wireless router. I can connect to the Internet fine, but I have lost the ability to transfer files over a cable (or over a wireless "ad hoc" network) between my two primary computers: to keep my computers synchronized I have to back one up to an external hard drive or memory stick and download to the other.

<u>Printers and Scanners</u>

I have two printers – an HP 450 deskjet portable and an HP officejet 4215 all-in-one printer-fax-scanner-copier. These have drivers for the Windows XP operating system, but not for the Windows Vista operating system. This is not a major problem, however, since Vista contains drivers for both printers. (The printers may be added through the "Printers" module of the control panel.) It is possible to print to either printer. The only thing that you lose is the ability to use the software interface that may be installed under XP, from the installation CD. If you try to install the printers from the installation CDs, you fail.

I have two scanners – an HP ScanJet 4400c flatbed scanner and a Canon CanoScan LiDE 35.flatbed scanner. Once again, it is not possible to install from the CDs. In this case, however, the lack of the user interface is debilitating. If you go to "Scanners and Cameras" in the Control Panel, the system can detect either scanner. Without the user-interface software, however, it is not possible to do anything with the scanners – copy, save (in various image formats) or optical-character read.

I checked the HP website to download drivers for Vista, but there are none. The message is: "We are sorry to inform you that there will be no Windows Vista support available for your HP product. Therefore your product will not work with Windows Vista. The majority of HP products not supported in Windows Vista are beyond seven years old. If you are using the Windows Vista operating system on your computer, please consider upgrading to a newer HP product that is supported on Windows Vista. HP has numerous products on the market that support Windows Vista: [no scanners are listed as acceptable trade-ins]."

So, my HP scanner, which works perfectly well under the XP operating system, is useless under the Vista operating system.

I visited the Canon website for drivers and a user interface. The site indicates that there are downloads for the LiDE 35, but when I downloaded them, they failed to install.

So, my Canon scanner is also completely unavailable under Vista.

I paid perhaps $100 for each of the scanners, and so now I will have to spend an additional $200, perhaps more, to have a scanning capability under Vista. (I use two scanners – a "large" standard one (the HP) at home, and a "thin" one (the Canon) for travel to less-developed countries, where many clients' offices have no scanners.)

In addition to the printers and scanners, my only other peripheral (other than external hard drives, which all work) is my Olympus camera. The Camedia software that came with the camera installed just fine, and works.

Application Software

I have a lot of application software, some of it rather expensive. This includes application development software such as Microsoft Access, Visual Basic, Visual C++, and FoxPro, and a number of mathematical / statistical programs, such as SPSS, Statistica, and S-Plus. These packages cost several hundred dollars originally, and the current versions of some of them now cost much more than this. Many of these programs will not install under Vista. Here follows my experience in attempting to install these programs.

<u>Installed Software Checklist</u>
<u>Microsoft Intel-based Operating System</u>

Date: 10 March 2007 (or_____)

Computer Description: HP Pavilion dv6000 dv6233se (computer name GeorgeHP, referred to as HP2 (or_____)

1. Operating System: MS Vista (or Microsoft XL, Linux, or other _____)
2. Internet Access System (AT&T/BellSouth Broadband Internet Access + Linksys 2.4 GHz Broadband Router; or simply connect to an existing wireless or wire system) (fails to install in Vista – must install on a computer using the XP operating system)
3. HP Deskjet 450 Portable Printer (CD fails to install in Vista, which has drivers anyway)
4. HP Deskjet 4215 all-in-one printer-fax-scanner-copier (CD fails to install in Vista, which has drivers anyway)
5. HP4400C scanjet flatbed scanner (fails to install in Vista)
6. Canon LiDE 35 flatbed scanner (fails to install in Vista; if OmniPage se is allowed to be installed from CD, it will cause MS Internet Explorer to stop)
7. Nero 6 OEM Suite (from Addonics CD copier) (incompatible with Vista)
8. Cakewalk PyroPlus (mp3 maker, CD/DVD copier)
9. Easy CD Creator 5 Basic (Roxio – from Toshiba Satellite) (incompatible with Vista)
10. Antivirus (latest year): Norton (or McAfee_____)
11. CoffeeCup FTP
12. MS Office XP Professional 2002 (and set up Outlook e-mail) (installs, but MS Access does not work properly)
13. MS FrontPage (98 then 2002 upgrade)
14. MS Visio Standard Version 2002
15. MS Project
16. Adobe Acrobat 5.0 (installs, but incompatibility issue)
17. MS Visual FoxPro 5.0
18. MS Visual Basic 5.0
19. MS Visual C++ Std Ed ver. 4.0 (fails to install in Vista ("setup cannot install ODBC"))
20. MS Visual J++ Prof. ver/ 1.1 (fails to install in Vista ("setup cannot install DAO components"))
21. Corel WordPerfect 8.0 (from SystemBoard 133, in folder CD1)
22. Star Office (AED Global Learning Portal / Sun) (don't install unless plan to use, since it will associate Sun programs with MS extensions, such as .doc)
23. PrintShop Version 12 (for business cards)
24. Memorex ExPressit Labelmaker (for CD labels)
25. TurboTax (latest year)
26. American Heritage Dictionary

27. Family Lawyer 2004
28. DK World Reference Atlas (fails to install in Vista)
29. Riverboat Casino (fails to install in Vista)
30. ArcView 3.2
31. George's Data (Copy from backup disk: AED, AED20040501, cities98, Destiny, Destiny2005, DownloadsGeorge, EdAssistZambia2004Source, EmailGeorge, George, Graph1_2007, HullVBA, JacksonStauntonVBA, Java*, mySQL*, PHP*, pop98, PicturesGeorge, ScansGeorge, Webshare/wwwroot/* (Foundation, ChurchOfNature))
32. WinZip 8.0 (from AED Tools) (fails to install in Vista)
33. DESTINY (installs in Vista, but MS Access fails)
34. EdAssist Zambia (installs in Vista, but MS Access fails)
35. vrp (fails to work in Vista)
36. FreeCell (if not already included in OS)
37. Olympus Camedia Digital Camera Software (or can use MS Windows to download pictures from camera)
38. ScanSoft PDF Converter 2.0 (fails to install in Vista)
39. Lotus SmartSuite 97 (fails to install in Vista)
40. Lotus SmartSuite Release 9.6 (2000) (fails to install in Vista)
41. Axum 5 (from MathSoft) (fails to install in Vista)
42. MathCad (from MathSoft) (fails to install in Vista)
43. Minitab (fails to install in Vista)
44. SPSS 7.5 (fails to install in Vista)
45. Statistica 5 (seems to install in Vista, but installation hangs up near end)
46. S-Plus 4 (fails to install in Vista)
47. Systat 6 (source on hard drive, in George07) (fails to install in Vista)
48. Quicken 2007 Basic (fails to install in Vista)
49. QuickBooks Pro 2002 (fails to install in Vista)
50. World Development Indicators 05
51. UNDP Human Development Report 2000, 2001, 2002
52. UNDP The Human Development Report Statistical Database 1999 and Full Text HDRs 1990-1999
53. UN Demographic Yearbook 1948-1997
54. State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) 2003-2004 (fails to install in Vista)
55. Mortpak 4.0 (fails to install in Vista)
56. Sams Teach Yourself Java 2 in 21 Days 4th edition (examples copied from backup disk, Java SDK fails to install in Vista)
57. Sams Teach Yourself Programming with Java in 24 Hours (examples copied from backup disk, Java SDK fails to install in Vista)
58. MS Visual J++ Learn Java Now examples (examples copied from backup disk, J++ fails to install in Vista)
59. Sams PHP and MySQL Web Development (examples copied from backup disk, fails to install in Vista)
60. Sams Teach Yourself PHP, MySQL and Apache All in One Julie C. Meloni (examples copied from backup disk, fails to install in Vista)
61. Addison-Wesley The Java Developer's Guide to Eclipse (fails to install in Vista)

CDs (should play – no software to install):
62. J G Caldwell Sings
63. J G Caldwell Speaks
64. DK Millennium Images
65. Turismo de Timor-Leste

As you can see from the above, much of the software fails to install in Vista. Some do install, but with the message that there are "compatibility issues" between it and Vista. For example, I use Adobe Acrobat Distiller to create .pdf files for my website. I can open and read .pdf files, but I cannot convert Word documents into .pdf files (printing to the Distiller). Hence, under Vista, I cannot continue to maintain my website using Adobe Acrobat 5.0 (since I include both .htm and .pdf files for each item on the website).

If I wish to acquire the same functionality under Vista as I had under XP, I will have to invest many thousands of dollars in new software. For some, I will be able to obtain upgrades for a couple of hundred dollars, but for many, since they are rather old, no upgrade will be available. Whereas I paid perhaps $300 for a program (statistical program, application development system) previously, the new versions are much more expensive, such as $1,000.

For most of my software applications, such as the statistical software packages and Adobe Acrobat, I have absolutely no need to purchase an upgrade, except for the fact that it will not work under the Microsoft Vista operating system. Much statistical software changes very little over the years, and the versions that I have could be used indefinitely, as long as the operating system permitted. All I use Adobe Acrobat for is to create pdf-format files, using the "Distiller" printer – I do not need to upgrade this product, unless I wish to use it under Vista.

For a number of my applications, I use the Microsoft Access database development system. This is a part of the XP Office suite, which installed without problem. Unfortunately, it does not work, except to do routine word processing. If I try to create a .pdf file using the ScanSoft .pdf converter add-on to Word (as an alternative to using the Adobe Acrobat Distiller), it fails. None of my Access programs that worked in XP work in Vista. In some cases, the program loads but no data show up on graphs. In some cases, the program hangs up, and if I ask for an error report, I usually get the message that the problem is a error in the Microsoft software, and that I should go to the Microsoft support website for an update download. I have done this, but most of the available downloads are for XP, not for Vista.

In addition to the software listed above, which is my "core" software, I have scores of other software CDs that work under XP but not under Vista. When Adobe Acrobat 5.0 failed to work under Vista, I purchased a new product, Perfect PDF Creator, from Office Max, for $20. This product fails to install under Vista. At the same time, I also purchased a language set (eLanguage Passport to 35 Languages, also priced at $20, or free with the first purchase). This also fails to install under Vista. It appears that the many stores that sell computer software (Office Max, Office Depot, Circuit City, Best Buy, etc.) are stocked with computer software that will not work under the Microsoft Vista operating system.

Vista User Interface

I do not like the Vista user interface. In many cases, the screen is much harder to read than it was under XP. For example, when you "select" one or more files to copy them, you can barely see the difference in color between the selected files and the unselected ones. You cannot easily see where a file's properties end, and so it is easy to accidentally drag and drop a file to the wrong place – to a folder within the open folder. The small triangle tags that allow you to expand (or collapse) a folder are very small (smaller than the "plus/minus" boxes under XP) and difficult to see (in pale blue color), so you have to squint to carefully place the mouse pointer on the triangle before clicking.

The location of many items has been moved. I assume that there is a logical reason for this, but it is not always clear what the rationale is. The Windows Explorer closes when you close an external hard drive or flash drive, rather than remaining open and simply closing the folder for the now-closed device. So you have to open the Windows Explorer again.

The "Connect to" wizards are poor. I am still not really sure whether I am prevented from communicating between two computers using a crossover UTP cable connecting the RJ-45 ports, or whether I simply have not discovered the way to do it in Vista.

Many of the windows used to "browse" to a folder location are so small that it takes two or three times as much time to find a folder as it did under XP.

The Overheating Problem

As I mentioned, the problem that motivated me to purchase the new HP Pavilion dv6000 computer was that my Averatec was overheating. When it overheats, the "blue screen of death" appears, and the machine cuts off. It is not possible to turn it back on until it cools down (say, after 15 minutes); sometimes, it is necessary to "reset" it by removing the battery and holding the "on" button down for a minute. The Averatec had an overheating problem when I first purchased it, and I returned it to the factory. They cleaned the fan, and when this did not fix the problem, they then replaced the fan. The fan is very loud (unlike the HPs, which are very quiet). When the recent overheating occurred, I opened the computer to examine the fan, and it was clean as a whistle. Since I could not see any reason why the computer was overheating, and the one-year warranty period was passed, I decided to replace it.

You can imagine my chagrin when, a few days after I purchased the HP dv6000, it overheated! The familiar blue screen of death appeared, but, unlike the Averatec, the computer did not automatically shut down. I had closed the computer, since I was leaving the room for a while. As long as no peripherals are connected, the machine is supposed to go into hibernation, and it always had before. This time, however, it did not go into hibernation, and evidently it is not designed to remain closed while running. When I returned to the room, the computer was "hot as a brick." If you are not careful to close the top of a portable computer all the way, then it will remain on. With the HP dv6000, however, there is no latch, and so the top closes all the way by itself (from spring pressure). It is not clear why the new HP did not go into hibernation when I closed it – there were no peripherals connected to it, and it was definitely closed.

Overall Assessment

Having spent several days working with Vista, I have now spent an additional $144 on a modem and hub (wireless router) to regain access to the Internet. My scanners do not work. Most of my application software does not work. I cannot create .pdf files from Word .doc files, for use on my Foundation website. My basic Microsoft Office Suite's Access program does not work. What is even worse, the Microsoft Access applications that I developed under XP (such as the DESTINY package, offered free on my Foundation website) does not work. *This is perhaps the most distressing aspect of the Vista operating system. All of the Microsoft Access database systems that I have developed in recent years, for myself and for clients, will not run properly under Vista.*

To obtain functionality comparable to what I had under XP, I will have to spend many thousands of dollars. Were I earlier in my career, I would do this. At this stage of my career, however, I

have no intention of spending thousands of dollars that I do not have to spend. I will simply continue to use the XP operating system.

In 1988, Joseph A. Tainter wrote a book entitled, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge University Press), in which he describes the fact that societies evolve to increasing complexity, to the point where they eventually collapse, primarily because of that complexity. In my view, Microsoft has committed a gross blunder with its Vista operating system. It is not a functional improvement over the XP operating system, and it is incompatible with much of the software that worked under XP.

I used the word "blunder" above, but it is not the correct word. Microsoft and the US government are no doubt very pleased that there will be a massive jump in computer software sales and gross national product, in order to upgrade all of the software that works under XP but not under Vista. The manufacturers of application software, such as SPSS and Adobe Acrobat, will be delighted that their software will not work under Vista. They will be very pleased to sell you an upgrade for Vista. Moreover, their hands will be "clean" in this matter – it is not *their* fault that none of their software works under Vista!

Users of the Microsoft Vista operating system will have to upgrade not only their application software packages, but their hardware drivers as well. In some cases, Microsoft has included new drivers, as it did for my late-model HP printer. The problem with hardware drivers, however, is that they are produced by the hardware manufacturer, not by Microsoft, and the manufacturer has absolutely no incentive to upgrade them for Vista. In fact, they have a *disincentive* to do so – if they do not provide a new driver for use with Vista, then you have to replace the hardware (as I must now do for my HP and Canon scanners).

The introduction of the Vista operating system will cause a boost in gross domestic product (GDP), in order to replace all of the software and hardware that worked under XP but not under Vista. This boost in GDP will be heartily welcomed not just by the computer hardware and software manufacturers, but by the US Government as well. This is just one more egregious example of how perverse our economic system is, counting replacement of prematurely obsolescent computer hardware and software, along with arson-destroyed buildings, in exactly the same way as original production.

I, for one, will not be participating in this wasteful endeavor. I will simply install the old XP operating system on my new HP dv6000 computer, and continue to use all of my hardware and software. It will be interesting to see what the general reaction of the public to the Vista operating system is. If the experience of the general public with Vista is similar to mine, then, in view of the serious issues that I have experienced with it, I would imagine that Microsoft is in for a rough time.

Update 13 March 2007. Yesterday, a reader of my website sent me an e-mail telling me that he had read this article, and he offered me a suggestion for creating .pdf files. He uses the Open Office word processing system, OpenOffice.org Writer, which is available for the Vista operating system, to create .pdf files. Acting on his suggestion, I visited Sun Microsystems' Open Office website, http://www.openoffice.org, and downloaded the OpenOffice.org 2.0 package (and the Java Runtime software). It contains essentially the same programs / functionality of Microsoft Office Suite (word processor, electronic spreadsheet, presentation graphics, database, equation editor, drawing tool), except for an e-mail product similar to MS Outlook. (I had tried out Sun's open-systems Star Office suite some time ago, but never used it – as long as you have Microsoft's Office installed, there is little incentive to switch to another office suite.)

The OpenOffice.org Writer program does save files in .pdf format ("Export as PDF" menu bar, under the File tab). Thanks to my reader for this very helpful information – the Sun OpenOffice.org suite not only works under Vista, but it is free! I will take a closer look at the database module ("Base") to see whether it can run, under Vista, the MS Access databases that I developed under XP. If it does, then, after many years of using Microsoft Office, it will be "sayonara."

<u>Update 4 April 2007</u>. Incredibly, in just a few weeks, this article has become one of the most frequently accessed articles on my website. I am getting all sorts of "hits" from visitors who have experienced the same problems that I experienced. They cannot use their old software, they cannot use their old (and even not-so-old) printers and scanners, and they cannot install even new wireless routers. They cannot communicate "peer-to-peer" using crossover cables. It appears that I am not alone in my problems with the Vista operating system. Misery *does* love company. Bill Gates: A plague on your house!