

## Wayne's Old Computer Gets Vista

February 8, 2007

By Wayne Rash

When Microsoft brings out a new operating system, it's always nice to know that you can actually take advantage of it. Sure, you're used to whatever you currently have, which is most likely Windows XP, but you also know that sooner or later, something new will come along that requires the new OS.

So when Vista finally shipped, I decided that the time had come. I'd upgrade one of the machines in the back room.



Surely, I thought, a dual-Xeon HP xw8000 workstation with a gigabyte of memory and fast hard disks could run nearly anything. Besides, this computer is new enough that it's still under warranty, so if I really got into trouble, I knew that I could always call HP's tech support for help.

### RELATED LINKS

- [Vista Is Here, Finally](#)
- [Dual-Booting Vista and Linux](#)
- [Gartner Offers Vista Upgrade Advice](#)
- [Vista's Nine Most Annoying Features](#)
- [Vista Chattiness Is in the Eye \(Ear?\) of the Beholder](#)

Turns out, I was wrong about a lot of things, including that. While I did manage to install Vista on the machine, you might want to think twice before trying the same thing in your business. Or your home, for that matter.

I knew that the upgrade would take a few steps, so I decided to keep a log of the process. Here's what happened:

**Jan. 30, 4 p.m.:** Vista was due, so the time had come to find out for sure if my HP workstation would run Vista. I'd tried out the Microsoft Vista Advisor (available free from Microsoft's Web site). I tried to run the copy of Advisor that I'd downloaded a month before, but it demanded an update. So I updated the Vista Advisor, and tried again.

Like nearly everyone else on the planet, it appears, I would need a better video card. I'd also need to uninstall something called "Nero" that I never used. And it mentioned that I might have problems with some other applications, notably Norton AntiVirus.

Advisor also provided a link to video cards that were certified to work, so I clicked on the NVidia site to see about a replacement for my NVidia Quadro that wouldn't work with Vista. The NVidia site was so overwhelmed, it wouldn't work at all.

**Jan. 31, 9 a.m.:** I tried to investigate video cards again, and this time the NVidia site worked, so I downloaded the list of cards that would work. Then I called HP to find out which one I should use in my xw8000.

[Click here](#) to read more about the release of Vista.

The tech support lady was very pleasant, and totally clueless. Her sole answer was that she supported Windows, not hardware. She didn't know how to find a hardware person, and clearly wasn't particularly interested.

The computer's manual, fortunately, provided a list of supported video cards, and a few of them were on the list provided by NVidia. But the xw8000 uses AGP cards, so I had to find something in that version. Back to the NVidia site. It's down. To the HP site. The AGP version of the cards aren't available. I tried the HP site for refurbished computers and accessories. No luck there, either.

**1 p.m.:** I took a long lunch break and visited CompUSA and Microcenter to see if they had the cards I needed. They didn't. Apparently Vista has been very good for the video card business. For the most part, the shelves were bare of Vista-compatible video hardware.

**8 p.m.:** Eventually, I struck paydirt with Google, Shopzilla, and a little company named CompuVest that apparently buys up discontinued, but new, parts. They had one of the cards I needed, an NVidia FX 3000 AGP. Even better, it was about 75 percent less than HP sold it for, assuming they'd had it. I ordered the card.

**Feb. 1, noon:** It occurred to me that I should also order Vista. So I took care of that over lunch.

**Next Page:** The video card arrives.

**Feb. 2, 4 p.m.:** The UPS guy walked into the office and handed me a flat box. "Sign here," he said. I looked at the address. It's from CompuVest. My new video card has arrived.

**6 p.m.:** Time to unpack the snazzy new NVidia FX 3000 video card. It's big, has lots of memory, and a fan. There's a cable that you plug into a drive power connector and a rectangular hole that you pass the cable through. So I attach the cable, take the side panel off the workstation, and get ready to install the card. Then I notice that one of the capacitors is loose, and the cooling fins look like they'd been abused with a ball peen hammer. It was a factory-sealed package with everything still intact, so apparently HP had whacked the board before selling it to CompuVest.

**6:30 p.m.** On the phone to CompuVest tech support. The support staff is appropriately horrified, and promises to overnight a new card immediately. That means I'll see it on Monday. This is fine, because I haven't received Vista yet anyway.

**Feb. 5, 12:30 p.m.:** Drove to the UPS Store and dropped off the damaged card.

**3 p.m.:** I'm on the phone doing an interview when the UPS guy walks in again. "Sign here," he said again. I did, and took the much larger box. Inside an amazing amount of packaging is another box, and even more packaging. Inside that is what appears to be an undamaged video card. Installation went as easily as these things ever do, and I closed up the computer and turned on the power. Nothing.

**3:15 p.m.:** After going through the troubleshooting process, I find the problem. I plug in the monitors, and all is well. Both work fine with Windows XP, SP2. Now it's time to run the Vista Advisor again. It reports that the hardware will work perfectly, so I uninstall Nero, which I still haven't used. I decide to leave Norton AntiVirus alone until after I install Vista.

**Feb. 7, 9:30 a.m.:** Vista Ultimate arrives. I decide to install it after lunch.

**1:30 p.m.:** The time has come. I insert the DVD that contains Vista into the drive on the xw8000 and let it start. After the usual questions, the installation starts. Not much seems to be happening, but the progress indicator is moving, so I go back to work.

**3 p.m.:** I check, and the installation continues. I notice that there's a message that it may take several hours. I go back to work.

**5 p.m.:** The computer has restarted twice, and is still installing. I wonder how long this would take on a machine with just one Pentium. Back to work.

**7 p.m.:** The installation finished when I wasn't looking. I tell Vista the answers to a couple of questions, and it restarts. Finally, the dual-boot screen shows up (I also run Linux on this machine) with a big question mark instead of a Windows logo where I'm supposed to select the startup operating system. I click it anyway, and it allows me to log in. All is well. Sort of.

Read more [here](#) about dual-booting Vista and Linux.

**7:15 p.m.:** The screen contains error messages indicating that Norton AntiVirus won't start. No surprise there. I knew that there was an update available on the Symantec Web site. So I go there and download it, then run it. It fails. I try again. It fails again.

**8 p.m.:** The Symantec Web site, cloaked in a veil of inscrutability, fails to offer useful suggestions. Eventually I find a help topic that tells me to download the free version, uninstall the old version, install the new version (making sure I have my install key ready) and I'll be all set. That fails because NAV won't uninstall.

**10:30 p.m.:** Eventually I resort to the Symantec removal tool, which is like using a hand grenade to kill a mouse. That does work, the installation proceeds, and the new version picks up the installation key from the 2006 version of NAV, thus losing my year's subscription.

**Feb. 8, 1:30 a.m.:** Norton AntiVirus is finally running, having decided that I'm only entitled to a 73-day subscription rather than the year that came with NAV 2007 when I installed it the previous week.

**2 a.m.:** Tired of NAV problems, I decide it's time to download SETI at Home, since that disappeared mysteriously during the Vista installation. I use Internet Explorer 7 for Vista. Something's odd. The characters in the title bar are in Chinese. I go to bed.

**9 a.m.:** IE7 still is speaking in Chinese. I check the language settings. English is the only one selected. I'd sent e-mail pleas to tech support at Symantec and Microsoft the earlier, so I checked for replies, only to find that IE7 also doesn't let me reply when I'm using Outlook Web Mail. I decide to go have coffee and use my primary work computer, letting the xw8000 alone with its Chinese titles.

**Later that Day:** Promises of help arrive from Microsoft and from Symantec. Actual help, however, does not. At least NAV will run for 72 more days, and it tells me I'm virus-free. Time to set my Chinese speaking, virus-free, workstation aside and let the news editor know that I'm alive and will be writing today.

Will the Vista problems be solved? Probably not before next week. On the other hand, the games on the machine all work fine, so the teenager in the family is delighted.

More next week as I continue to try upgrading to Vista. I still haven't tried the rest of the applications, so I'm sure there's more lying in wait to tell you about.

*Senior Writer Wayne Rash is a longtime technology writer and journalist based in Washington, D.C. He's the author of four books related to technology. He can be reached at [wayne\\_rash@ziffdavis.com](mailto:wayne_rash@ziffdavis.com).*

***Click here for an archive of Wayne Rash's columns.***