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## Lawsuit spotlights Vista's hefty hardware needs

Patrick Thibodeau

**April 05, 2007** (Computerworld) If you bought a Windows Vista Capable PC late last year and want to move up to the Home Premium version of the Vista operating system, you may already need a hardware upgrade.

A lawsuit filed last week against Microsoft Corp. alleges that some of the people who bought machines labeled as "capable" of running the OS were misled because some of the systems could only run Windows Vista Home Basic -- not the Premium edition. Jeffrey Thomas, an attorney at Gordon Murray Tilden LLP in Seattle, which filed the suit, called the Premium edition of Vista "the real Vista."

He is seeking class action status for the suit in U.S. District Court in Seattle.

The lawsuit focuses on users who bought hardware last year, before the operating system -- available to consumers since Jan. 30 -- was released. "Consumers didn't know what 'Windows Vista Capable' meant," or that some systems "won't run the Premium [version] at all," he said.

Microsoft says the information about Vista and its different editions was clear. "This well-documented effort occurred as part of the Windows Vista Capable program, which provided valuable information to consumers seeking to purchase PCs before Windows Vista was released to the general public in January 2007," Jack Evans, a Microsoft spokesman, said in a statement. "We look forward to presenting this information to the court and addressing all other issues raised in this lawsuit."

A key problem for Windows Vista Capable hardware users revolves around system memory requirements, graphics memory or both, said Thomas, noting that users of those systems will need upgrades to run the premium edition. CPU speed, by contrast, isn't an issue for most users, with many systems already having a minimum 1GHz processor, he said.

The amount of RAM was a differentiator between hardware with the Windows Vista Capable label and Vista Premium Ready systems. Vista Capable computers met only certain hardware requirements, such as 512MB of RAM, while Premium Ready systems have at least 1GB.

Home users aren't alone in terms of needing hardware upgrades. Everdream Inc., a Fremont, Calif.-based company that provides managed services, [released](#) the results of a survey last week that collected data on 145,000 desktops and laptops it manages for customers via an agent installed on their systems. The survey was used to determine customers' hardware capabilities.

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1

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It found that 70% of the desktops and laptops in business use didn't have the minimum 1GB of RAM needed for Vista Premium Ready PCs -- and 62% didn't have a big enough hard drive, among other hardware needs. In total, 80% of the systems didn't meet one or more of the requirements for Vista Premium.

The percentage of systems that meet Vista requirements increases if the minimum RAM cutoff is lowered to 512MB of RAM. Using that as the benchmark means that only about 25% of the systems wouldn't meet that RAM minimum.

Jim Obsitnik, director of marketing at Everdream, believes many users will upgrade their hardware -- particularly on systems less than two years old -- to take advantage of Vista's high-end features -- especially when it comes to security. "The user experience that someone has if they have minimum versus recommended requirements is going to be quite dramatic," he said.

Obsitnik isn't alone. Running the entry-level Windows Vista OS on the minimum hardware has been described by one vendor, Dell Inc., as "Great for booting the operating system, without running applications or games." Dell [recommends](#) 2GB RAM, among other hardware requirements, for the best performance.

There is debate about how much RAM users should order with Vista, and even whether it's worth spending extra money to install the maximum amount of RAM that a 32-bit system can address, which is up to 4GB.

When asked about Windows Vista RAM utilization, a Hewlett-Packard Inc. spokeswoman pointed to a paper [\(download PDF\)](#) the company wrote on RAM allocation with Microsoft Windows XP Professional. HP said that the 32-bit version of XP professional limits available RAM "to noticeably less than 4GB."

The use of graphic cards could also play a major role. "A high-end graphics card with 256MB of memory may limit addressable RAM to about 3GB, while cards with less memory may enable higher limits."

A Gateway Inc. spokesman said that 32-bit Vista that has 4GB on it doesn't really use any more than 3GB of RAM and is using the last gigabyte of addressable space for things like graphics modules and modems.