
Interview with a Windows 7 Deployment Expert

By Rick Broida - Jan 25, 2013

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Tomica Kaniski wears a lot of hats. For starters, he's a tech lead and systems engineer at Microsoft Innovation Center in Varazdin, Croatia, which focuses on small and medium businesses, local ISVs, and start-ups. He's also the Microsoft Community User Group Lead (IT Pro Group), Microsoft Student Partners Lead, and, last but not least, Microsoft MVP for Management Infrastructure. Busy guy!

Because Kaniski spends much of his time helping businesses deploy and learn Windows 7, I asked him to share some tips and tricks of the trade:

MEZ: When it comes to deploying Windows 7 in an SMB environment, what are your favorite tools?

TK: I must say that one of first tools in my "deployment toolbox" that I seriously used was ImageX--in other words, Windows AIK. For the time being, I just enjoyed working with it (OK, it was tough in the beginning, but it also was fun). At this time, I was a fresh student eager to learn something new, and WAIK (or even better, the whole Windows deployment process) looked somewhat cool (especially with Windows Vista).

After some time, I tried MDT and was fascinated with it. Some things that I was earlier doing manually suddenly were automated. The deployment using MDT was so much easier and faster (and not to mention, the tool was and is still free). Third tool that I use is SCCM--OK, it's not free, and it certainly looks a little scary at first, but it's so powerful.

MEZ: What's the biggest challenge a business faces in migrating to Windows 7? Cost? Time? App compatibility?

TK: For me, the biggest challenge for a business to migrate to Windows 7 is application compatibility, because all of the new things that came with this version of Windows (in comparison to Windows XP that is being still being used and preferred by many people--at least in my country). Some of the applications are still struggling with the new Windows, but there are ways to overcome these issues. I mean, the user interface is not (basically) so much different from what we are used to, the cost is almost always the issue, but as everything else needs to be replaced at some point in time, the software also needs upgrading, and I think a migration to Windows 7 is a logical step right now.

MEZ: In your experience, how have end-users reacted to Windows 7?

TK: I think that the end-user reaction to Windows 7 was very good. Everyone was expecting the new Windows to be so much better than Vista (which indeed was a very good idea but I think that it came before the market was ready for so many changes). After one year on the market, with SP1 coming close to being released, the interest is still very large--many people like the new "look and feel," new features, etc. Just for example, from my personal experience, many Vista users are grateful for the less annoying UAC, and just because of this "feature" they like Windows 7 even more.

MEZ: Name some of your favorite Windows 7 features.

TK: One of the coolest features in Windows 7, at least for me, is the "Boot from VHD" feature (and also the native VHD support). I've been using it since the prerelease versions, and it certainly helped me a lot since then. Multi-boot scenarios were at once so much easier to accomplish and switching operating system installations was simple. As I'm using my notebook mainly for presentations and its software configuration changes frequently, it was a relief to use prepared VHDs and switch between them when needed (and always having a backup copy of the VHDs ready was also convenient). The other "big" feature is Win+P keyboard shortcut--it's so easy to switch displays whenever you need it (and I need it a lot).

MEZ: What advice would you give other IT pros who are evaluating or beginning a Windows 7 migration?

TK: To all the IT pros out there that are considering Windows 7 migration, I would say couple of things: don't be afraid to try the migration, feel free to ask your more experienced colleagues for any help that you need (I certainly did and didn't regret it) and use the resources that are available to you. And last, but not least, if you're doing it for the first time, always make a backup!

Thanks for the advice, Tomica! (IT pros sometimes think they're above making backups, but accidents and drive failures play no favorites.) In case you missed it, be sure to check out my recent interview with Autodesk.

