Do you ever simultaneously feel like an idiot and also grateful that you’ve done at least something – anything – right?

Over the semester break between Christmas and the middle of January, I began the move from Windows XP Pro to Windows 7 on my main system in my home office. For many years, I’ve maintained two parallel tower computers, MAIN and SPARE, each running the almost all the same applications (yes, I buy two licenses for the software when the end-user license agreements don’t allow multiple installations). Using Microsoft SyncToy, I synchronize MAIN to an external 250 GB USB disk drive every morning (all sensitive data are stored in volumes encrypted using PGP Desktop Home v9.12.0 on both systems and on the external drive). Norwich University (NU)-specific data are synchronized to the NU-supplied laptop computer on which I work when I am at the University. In the evening, I synchronize the laptop files to the 250 GB drive and then to both MAIN and SPARE. An automated backup creates an encrypted incremental backup every night which then gets stored on the MAIN, the external drive, and the SPARE. At the end of every month, all the incrementals are also copied to a 1 TB external drive for long-term storage.

In preparing for the conversion from Windows XP Pro to Windows 7, I installed the Windows 7 Beta on SPARE in January 2009. Throughout the year, the software upgraded itself automatically and I sent in crash reports, bug reports, suggestions, and complaints (What a good boy am I) to help improve the product. Installed the Release Candidate (RC) when it became available in May 2009. The system ran pretty well – better and better as the updates fixed bugs and improved the severely limited HELP functions (originally, most of the topics listed in HELP were blank).

In December 2009, I purchased two copies of the academic edition of Windows 7 Professional Update at a tremendous discount (only $40 a copy) – completely forgetting that Windows 7 cannot be upgraded from anything but an installation of Windows VISTA and totally missing the table on the order pages that clearly showed that Windows XP Pro is not supported for upgrades! So there’s the idiot factor: one of the upgrades was perfectly usable – it upgraded from Windows 7 RC to Windows 7 on SPARE with no problem at all. However, the attempt to upgrade MAIN was to end in failure.

So in mid-December, I used the Windows 7 Upgrade Advisor on MAIN and found that it was perfect for the move to Windows 7. I wish the product had warned me that Windows XP Pro was not supported for upgrades, but so be it. After downloading all the appropriate new drivers using DriverGenius
http://www.driver-soft.com/>, which I’ve used for years, preparing a full backup and ensuring that drivers were accessible on the 250 GB USB drive, I launched into the Windows 7 upgrade.

It seemed fine for a few minutes, but when I entered the serial number, the installer simply rejected it. There was no explanation to tell the user that upgrades from Windows XP to Windows 7 are not permitted; it simply said that the key was bad.

After a couple of hours on the line with Hewlett-Packard (HP) Support (because HP originally built MAIN to my specifications), we finally figured out what the problem was. Off I went to my neighborhood Staples (well, neighborhood considering I live in a rural area: it’s nine miles away) to buy a full-installation version of Windows 7 Professional for $300.

The installation of Windows 7 failed again, this time apparently because my main disk is actually a RAID-1< http://lookup.computerlanguage.com/host_app/search?cid=C000420&term=RAID > and Windows 7 cannot be installed on a RAID-1 array.

At the time of this writing (early January 2010), I’m happily working away on SPARE but MAIN is completely unusable. I’m waiting for a callback from the HP support team.

One final note: For unfathomable reasons, Microsoft engineers did not provide a tool for extracting data from backup files created by the Windows XP backup utility. The .bkf files are unrecognized on Windows 7.< http://www.winhelponline.com/blog/restore-bkf-file-ntbackup-windows-7-vista > Luckily, the old backup utility does work OK under Windows 7 and is still available – no thanks to Microsoft – from a Web site run by S. T. Sanford< http://www.stsanford.com/pebuilder/ >. The .cat file nt5backup.cab< http://www.stsanford.com/pebuilder/nt5backup.cab > can be expanded and all the files placed (with their subfolders) into an appropriate folder in the Programs directory under Windows 7.

Conclusions:

- User idiocy resulted in my ignoring documented restrictions on installing Windows 7 onto a Windows XP platform;
- Microsoft’s decision to ignore Windows XP systems for upgrades may be revenge for the installed base’s overwhelming refusal to upgrade from XP to Vista;< http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2286065,00.asp >
- Microsoft’s diagnostic program failed to alert me to a major incompatibility on MAIN that prevents installation (so far) of Windows 7;
- Microsoft provided no supported tool under Windows 7 of reading backups created under Windows XP;
- A consistent business continuity plan paid off in zero downtime and zero data loss.

Happy New Year.

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