

Tech Savvy: OSX

Mac OSX 10.6, Snow Leopard, is a step in the right direction for Apple solving many concerns about the real world and business use of this advanced OS. Is it worth upgrading to? Is it worth switching from a PC to a Mac? Maybe. In this week's Tech Savvy we'll have a look at the pros and cons so you'll have enough information to make an informed decision yourself.

First the bad news. With every new operating system there are trade-offs and bugs. Snow Leopard has some software compatibility issues. While it isn't an issue 99% of the time, if you use oddball or older software, you could have an issue.

Now for the good news, and there's a lot. The biggest change in the new Mac OS is integration and speed improvements. Apple engineers have obviously been hard at work tuning and tweaking to good effect. The startup, shutdown, opening applications, and multimedia are quicker. You can now see at a glance what is running on the machine, even if the windows are minimized. Simply click and hold on an application icon in the Dock to bring up tiled thumbnails of all open applications. This makes it easier to switch tasks quickly and efficiently.

Finder has received enhancements. Photos and videos may be previewed directly simply by hovering the mouse over them. Handling stacks (collections of things like pictures) has improved. You can now have more than a screen full of stuff by scrolling around, and even organize the stacks with folders which may be opened without returning to the finder.

Standard applications have improved. Quicktime X has been polished with an very intuitive interface. Video editing is simple, by a click and drag of the start and endpoints of the video clip. It allows you to upload the clip to YouTube or convert them for use on your iPhone. Moving the cursor out of a playing video clip, the interface and buttons fade away and the display expands to fit the window or screen.

Preview, the default PDF viewer on the Mac, has been reworked to make its use more intuitive. The text is kept to maximum window size, but when the mouse is within the window, the navigation buttons appear unobtrusively in the document.

Safari 4 has Top Sites that puts the most frequently viewed websites on a virtual wall to speed you daily web commute. It also allows you to flip forward and back through thumbnails of your browsing history like a book.

Mac OSX Snow leopard now supports Microsoft Exchange servers. While this isn't a big deal to home users, it sets up Macs for business use. Exchange combines email, contact information, calendars, and other productivity resources. The gotcha is that it only supports Exchange 2007 with webmail turned on. The better news is that Microsoft is looking at adding Outlook to Office for Mac, which will make the support native.

Is it worth the bother to upgrade? It depends. If you use oddball or outdated software, you may want to stick to what you have. If you do a lot of multimedia viewing or production, it's well worth the upgrade. For the average Apple Macintosh user, it is worth the upgrade. For a business Mac user, the enhancements make this upgrade a must. If you've been tempted to move a business to Mac on the

desktop, Snow Leopard is worth a look.