

A year ago Steve produced a first look at Windows 8, six months before its full release. It's a step-change after seventeen years of development from Windows 95 to Windows 7. We thought, then, that many people would stick with Windows XP, Vista or Windows 7 and not upgrade to Windows 8 until they must. So it has proved.

Windows 8 is geared to be used with a touch-screen as can be seen on smart-phones and tablets. It can, of course, also be readily used with a mouse, but the plan is to encourage customers to get the full benefit of touch-screen technology across all platforms.

Mike J now uses Windows 8 on a laptop (no touch-screen) and described what he has done so far, using a standard mouse. The first difference is that you must have a (free) Microsoft account with a password that must be entered when starting Windows 8. It encourages a better approach to personal computing security.

The next difference is that the *START* button has gone. For years Microsoft were slated for providing a start button that had to be pressed to *STOP* the computer. There were howls of derision, but now it's gone, people miss it! Its function is still available, of course, but it is called something else and put into the *CHARMS* menu.

The Charms menu appears whenever the pointer goes to the right-hand side of the screen. It reveals several icons for basic features.

The desktop is new, as is access to the programmes, but these are such basic operations that one quickly gets used to them. The treat is that the whole thing starts up and closes much faster. Mike wonders if the speed will be retained as the computer is loaded with more applications.

To reduce clutter on the opening screen Microsoft has introduced invisible hotspots in the corners: when the pointer hits one there is a predetermined response and an icon appears.

These differences in operation should quickly become second nature and present no difficulty. It is possible to customise the machine to use a more familiar interface. There was no time to dig further into customisation, but if Microsoft is true to form, there will be endless options available.

There are much better parental controls for safe use by children.

Should you upgrade? Mike thinks it's a coin-toss. Yes, if you want the latest stuff. You might not find enormous benefit by upgrading from Windows 7. If you are running anything older than 7 you will notice the benefit, otherwise you will probably wait until you need to replace your kit and get Windows 8 pre-installed.

One word of caution: not all programmes will run under Windows 8. Download the (free) Upgrade Advisor programme from Microsoft to identify any application that will not run.

