

For Colleges, the Upgrade to Windows 8 Marks an Important Shift in Computing

Upgrade hinges on many factors, including budget, IT capabilities and devices already in use.

Seton Hall University has long been on the cutting edge of technology. Since 1997, it has been equipping freshmen and rising juniors with Lenovo notebooks running the [latest version of Windows](#) [1].

So when Microsoft approached the university to ask if it wanted to be one of the first higher education beta users of Windows 8, Seton Hall's IT team jumped at the chance.

"We were really excited to be able to provide feedback to Microsoft to iron out the kinks and make sure it met enterprise standards and requirements," says David Middleton, executive director for the Center for Mobile Research and Innovation at the South Orange, N.J., university.

Whether a college opts for a quick rollout of the new operating system or decides to phase it in slowly hinges on many factors, including budget, IT capabilities and devices already in use, to name a few. But one thing is clear: IT departments need to be ready to support students running the OS on their own systems.

It's not surprising that students are enthusiastic early adopters of Windows 8, says Roger Kay, president of Endpoint Technologies Associates,

6 Notable New Features in Windows 8

- **Live Tiles:** Windows 8 uses these to display real-time information from applications — even when an app isn't running. For example, if the calendar app isn't open, its Live Tile will display upcoming appointments. Similarly, this feature can display the latest news, sports scores, stock market data and the like.
- **Multitouch gestures:** Although it is still possible to use a mouse and keyboard with Windows 8, the new touch-friendly operating system supports common gestures — finger slides, swipes, pinches and taps — to perform functions.
- **Charms bar:** Located in an opaque icon bar on the right side of the Windows 8 desktop, the "charms" are quick triggers for common functions, such as systemwide searching, sharing information across apps or with other users, and system settings.
- **Better performance:** The new OS runs faster than its predecessor — according to some benchmarks, twice as fast — because it uses less RAM and fewer CPU resources.
- **Secure Boot:** This Windows 8 security feature identifies and shuts down malware--infected startup files in the boot sector of the hard disk, preventing them from loading as the OS boots up. Another new feature, Windows Defender, provides built-in anti-virus protection.
- **Improved data management:** The new OS provides integrated, speedy touch-screen

because the new OS allows users to take advantage of their device's touch-screen capabilities. In academia, touch is particularly important, given the demographic of the users and the types of applications they work with, Kay says.

access to SkyDrive, Microsoft's file hosting service, and further enhances storage options with Storage Spaces, a new utility that lets users create fault-tolerant storage "pools" for managing and backing up data from multiple devices.

Users, Start Your OSs

The move to Windows 8 suits Seton Hall's broader goals of making it easier for all students and faculty to be part of the overall university ecosystem. "We wanted to be able to foster the collaboration that could occur by having everybody on this platform, all with access to common tools, services and resources, such as OneNote and Office 365," Middleton says. "The idea is that students can work together on assignments regardless of the device they are using — a Windows phone, desktop or tablet."

The pilot started in early 2012, when the university issued one-third of the freshman class (about 450 students) Samsung Series 7 Slate PCs upgraded to Windows 8. During the pilot (a follow-on to an earlier pilot of Android devices), students participated in a survey about their likes and dislikes. The positives far outweighed the negatives, Middleton says.

Students reported that they liked the ability to use the familiar Office applications on Windows 8, along with OneNote, which allowed them to take notes with a pen and add images. They also liked the form factor and user-friendly touch interface.

The pilot was so successful that the remainder of the freshman class was issued Samsung Series 5 Ultrabooks upgraded to Windows 8 in fall 2012.

Moving Forward, One Step at a Time

Marquette University, a Jesuit university in Milwaukee with about 12,000 students, also has been beta-testing Windows 8 and plans to implement the new OS on about 100 touch-screen tablets as soon as Microsoft releases its System Center 2012 Configuration Manager (SCCM) Service Pack 1.

CIO Kathy Lang says SCCM will allow the IT staff to push updates to devices automatically instead of manually.

After the initial upgrade, the university will follow its existing policy of a four-year technology refresh cycle for staff and faculty. That means staff who have Windows 7 devices will continue to use them until it's time to upgrade to a new device that comes with Windows 8. Eventually, about 2,500 staff and faculty will have Windows 8-enabled devices.

For now, Lang envisions staff and faculty using Windows

75%

The percentage of Seton Hall students who indicate that Windows 8 is an improvement over Windows 7

SOURCE: Seton Hall

University student survey,
2012

8 capabilities to improve note taking in meetings and better perform other tasks, but she expects that its use among staff will expand rapidly.

"Eventually, we would like to test Windows 8 on tablets in the classroom with the faculty to see if tablets could be a viable replacement for desktop PCs," she says.

At Marquette, like Seton Hall, the primary driver is the students, some of whom already are using Windows 8. "We are ready to support Windows 8 for students because they are already asking," Lang says. "We can handle questions about setup, viruses and anything else they need."

Meanwhile, at Boise State University in Idaho, the pace of change is a bit slower. Although students who are using Windows 8 on their own devices can receive support from IT staff, users of university-supplied systems will have to wait another year or more for the new OS. "There is definitely interest from our staff — the first day it was available, a staff member asked for it," says Mark Fitzgerald, director of customer care in the university's Office of IT. "But we don't see it as a rush, and we have a few other projects to get to first."

One of the reasons for waiting, he says, is because implementing Windows 8 in one part of the university likely will have a cascading effect, immediately making it a large-scale project.

"Once we put it in our computer labs, we'll have to push it to our classroom computers because we keep them both on the same image," he says. "Then we'll need to get it to faculty, and then staff."

Eventually, all 550 lab and classroom computers (now running Windows 7) will be upgraded to Windows 8.

Fitzgerald says he is looking forward to taking advantage of some of the new OS's security and storage improvements, such as the BitLocker Drive Encryption feature, which guards against data theft on lost or stolen devices, and the File History backup feature for versioning.

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