rubiconn review

From High Tech to High Touch!

Windows 7 @ Home

Networking isn't just for business anymore --these days, home networks are the norm. In response, Microsoft is offering the **Windows 7 Family Pack**, which includes three licenses for Windows 7 Home Premium at a discounted price. The multi-license bundle isn't Microsoft's only move: In Windows 7 the company has made networking home PCs and sharing their files and folders much simpler. Whether you need to connect to the network, to share printers and resources, to access and play music, or to do anything else across the network, Windows 7 makes the entire process more seamless and intuitive than it was in XP or Vista.

Managing Home Network Connections

In Windows 7, Microsoft has improved the Network and Sharing Center (introduced in Windows Vista) to provide greater functionality and make it the go-to place for managing all aspects of network connectivity.

The Network and Sharing Center, which is available in the Windows 7 Starter, Home Premium, Professional, and Ultimate editions, allows you to find new networks and create new network connections, verify connection status, and troubleshoot network connectivity issues.

At the top is a visual representation of the current connection; you'll also find a link that displays the full map of your network, visually. If you lose your con-

nection, the graphic will show the broken connection so that you can easily identify which portion is down.

You can click Troubleshoot problems at the bottom of the Network and Sharing Center to initiate diagnostic tests that will help you identify and resolve the issue. You can also establish new wireless-network or VPN connections by clicking Set up a new connection or network and following the prompts in the wizard.

The left side of the Network and Sharing Center provides links to more advanced networking functions such as changing adapter settings or managing the Windows Firewall. One significant enhancement in Windows 7 gives you the ability to configure unique firewall profiles for the different location types (Home, Work, and Public); as you move from one location to another, Windows 7 will automatically apply the firewall rules for the appropriate location type.

HomeGroup

The next significant enhancement in Windows 7 is the HomeGroup. Microsoft designed the HomeGroup to mimic the way people generally protect their homes: You keep the outside doors locked to deter unwanted visitors, but you keep the interior doors unlocked to allow free passage for family members. When guests visit your home, you give them access to common areas such as the living room, but typically you don't let them venture into bedrooms or other private areas.

The HomeGroup allows you to share resources, such as files and printers, only

with those who join the HomeGroup by entering the proper password. You can still grant guests access to the network to connect to the Internet, without inviting them to join the HomeGroup.

You have a few different ways to create a HomeGroup: You can select HomeGroup in the Control Panel, you can use the HomeGroup link at the bottom left of the Network and Sharing Center, or you can click the Choose HomeGroup and sharing options link from the Network and Sharing Center console.

Regardless of how you get there, click the Create a HomeGroup button to begin the process. Select the Libraries you want to share with other members of the HomeGroup by checking or unchecking the appropriate boxes.

After you click Next to create the HomeGroup, Windows 7 will automatically generate a password, which other users will need in order to join the HomeGroup and share the resources.

Inside this issue:

Windows 7 @ Home (continued)

The password is intentionally complex to provide better security; if you wish, however, you can change it after you set up the HomeGroup, by again going to Choose HomeGroup and sharing options from the Network and Sharing Center.

Once you have joined a HomeGroup, you can click Choose HomeGroup and sharing options to reach controls for determining what resources to share from your computer, or for excluding specific files and folders that you don't want other computers in the HomeGroup to access.

All versions of Windows 7 can participate in a HomeGroup, but Windows 7 Starter and Windows 7 Home Basic versions cannot create a HomeGroup on their own. Unfortunately, HomeGroup does not work with prior versions of Windows, so any Windows XP or Windows Vista systems will be unable to participate.

Sharing Media

Though HomeGroup takes the headache out of sharing resources, the really cool network sharing feature in Windows 7 is the OS's ability to share music between devices and to stream media to any connected device on the network.

You can turn on the media-streaming functionality through Windows Media Player. Click Stream and choose from the options available in the drop-down menu. In this menu you can allow other devices to play media from your computer, permit other devices to control your Windows Media Player remotely, or allow streaming of media to and from the Internet, making your music available from anywhere.

This interconnected media network, which can also include devices such as Zune media players or the Xbox 360 game console, enables you to share and access all of your media from virtually anywhere on the network, as if it were all part of a common pool.

You can view music or recorded TV shows from remote libraries and play them by streaming the material across the network. Or, if you want to watch a recorded TV show during, say, a flight, you can easily transfer it to your laptop so that you have a local copy for viewing.

With the PlayTo feature you can select songs--or even whole playlists--and direct them to stream to and play on connected devices. For example, you can choose a playlist on your Windows 7 PC and have it play on your streaming-compatible

stereo system in your living room. A PlayTo icon is at the top of the playlist pane, on the right side of the Windows Media Player console. You can also right-click on Music and video files and choose PlayTo from the menu to select the devices to which you want to stream the media.

From Windows 2000 to XP to Vista, Microsoft has made steady improvements in the operating system's networking features and functionality. Years from now, though, Windows 7 will be remembered as the version that finally got it right, making networking simple enough that the average user can manage it without having to invite the family tech guru over for dinner.

RUBY-LICIOUS RECIPES

The Quintessential Christmas Cookie. I make these by the truck-load!

Pecan Sandies

1 cup butter (room temperature)
2 ¼ cups flour
1/3 cup sugar
1 tsp vanilla
1 cup shopped pecans
1 cup sifted powdered sugar

A recipe from Sarah Ruby, the Pie-Lady of Pleasanton

Directions: Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a mixing bowl, beat butter with an electric mixer on medium to high speed for 30 seconds. Add about half of the flour, the sugar, vanilla, and 1 tablespoon water. Beat until thoroughly combined. Beat in remaining flour. Stir in pecans.

Shape into 1 inch balls. Place on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake in a 325 degree oven for about 20 minutes or until the bottoms of the cookies are lightly browned. Cool cookies on a wire rack. Gently shake cooled cookies in a bag with powdered sugar. Makes about 36.

Do you have a Backup Plan? Have you tested it?

Many Small and Medium Sized Businesses do not yet recognize the need for a detailed backup and recovery plan. Below are interesting statistics and a few initial steps for securing your data.

40% of Small and Medium Sized Businesses don't back up their data at all. *(Source: The Diffusion Group TDG.)*

Hopefully you are not in this group but if you are, the time to address this issue is now. There are numerous hardware and software based solutions and methodologies for system backup. The most important first step to creating a successful backup and recovery plan is to locate the data that you cannot afford to lose.

60% of all data is on PC desktops and laptops. *(Source: The Diffusion Group TDG.)*

If you are currently under the impression that "all" of your mission critical company information is on your server, you may want to re-evaluate your assumptions. By creating network file shares and training/requiring your employees to use them, you can eliminate the data loss risks associated with de-centralized file stores. Once you have centrally located your data stores (or at least identified their whereabouts) you can configure the scope and frequency of your backup jobs.

40 - 50% of all backups are not fully recoverable and up to 60% of all backups fail in general. *(Source: The Diffusion Group TDG.)*

Part of any detailed backup and recovery plan must include regular test restores of all critical data. Most backup solutions offer job logging which will report the success or failure of every job. However, creating the log is not enough, a staff member or network systems administrator must be assigned to review the logs and act accordingly. Remote backup solutions allow you to accomplish the final critical step of your backup and recovery plan which is to store the backup in a secure location. This will prevent site specific disasters from destroying your company's data stores.

Although there is a cost associated with implementing a sound backup and recovery plan, there is greater cost in doing nothing.

93% of companies that lost their data for 10 days or more filed for bankruptcy within one year of the disaster, and **50% filed for bankruptcy immediately. *(Source: National Archives & Records Administration in Washington.)***

20% of small to medium-sized businesses will suffer a major disaster causing loss of critical data every 5 years*. (Source: Richmond House Group)*

If you do not yet have a backup and recovery plan, please contact Rubiconn for assistance. If you have implemented a plan, we will gladly arrange a complementary review so that you may enjoy the peace of mind that comes with a comprehensive data protection solution.

Holiday Virus Warning

Viruses are always a threat during the holidays. While Rubiconn does provide excellent protection from viruses and spam through our Barracuda spam firewall, there is still a slight chance that you may receive a virus in your email box. Here are some common ways to lessen your chance of accidentally infecting your work computer:

1.   **Read Email carefully before you CLICK.**

The common holiday virus we see is a message that appears like it is from UPS or FedEx indicating your package can not be delivered. It often has spelling errors and is grammatically incorrect. Once you click on the attachment, the only package you get is a nifty virus packed with pop-up windows!

2.   **Use your home email address when ordering online / don't check your home email at work.** Not only will this reduce your amount of spam received, but it will also help prevent receiving viruses on your work computers.

3.   **Don't just Click. Click. Click…** We all like to do it… ooh, a link... Ooh, an attachment... Click, Click, Click. But just as you would not walk out into the street without looking both ways, don't just click without reading what you are clicking on.

Rubiconn wishes everyone safe and happy Computing this holiday season!

Cool Gadgets Under $25

There may not be enough juice in that AA battery to power your camera, but before throwing it away, feed it to Battery Eater! As this hungry guy eats up the last bit of power, his eyes blink with delight! When he stops blinking, you'll know the power is depleted, and you can safely recycle the battery without concern about a pile of batteries reacting. Magnetic—sticks to the fridge or filing cabinet. Sounds like a fun $6.95 to splurge on when you're feeling like a random purchase during this holiday season. Available at Amazon.com.

Admit it! You still love Legos. Have some fun with your iPod this holiday season by adding a tiny speaker system This little stereo speaker brick actually sounds great - thanks in part to its "Active Bass System." Plug it in and show the world your love of building bricks - all while you rock it out. Available at www.thinkgeek.com for $19.99

There is nothing quite like getting a brand new gizmo to play around with, but more often than not we are sometimes confronted with un-for-seen circumstances that do a number on our new purchase, including a lightning strike during a vicious storm that knocks out our favorite gizmo. The ElectroMan Surge Protector is a hideous vision into our potential future. Look at his smiling face – happy to provide you with power. Look at his glowing heart – happy to protect your four electronic devices from surges. Look at the cord coming out of his head – ok, don't look at that; it's a little weird. But think of how happy you will be plugging your doodads into the ElectroMan. Happiness and surge protection in perfect combination. Available for $19.99 at www.coolest-gadgets.com

Best Family Gaming System

The Nintendo Wii is, by far, the Rubiconn Staff favorite! The Ninetendo Wii has a compact design, can be placed vertically or horizontally and provides great fun for everyone including grandparents. It is an excellent way for parents to take part in their child's gaming experience. The Wii has a very mature product line of games available in all genres. It is backwards compatible to all Nintendo Game Cube games and can connect to the Ninendo DS. The Wii connects to an internet connection via wireless internet where you can download additional content to enhance your experience.

For a special treat for the whole family, purchase the new game "New Super Mario Bros". "It's a lot of fun. The advantage is the four-player ability where you can either help each other or kill each other and race to the end of the level. It's like Classic Mario with a new twist," says Bill Becker, Rubiconn Senior Technician.

Best Video Recorder for the Price

Priced at $199.99 (Retail), the Flip Ultra HD provides the best cost, quality and convenience when rated amongst it's competitors. The Flip Ultra HD is an easy to use, pocket-sized HD camcorder featuring one-touch recording and digital zoom. It captures up to 120 minutes of HD video on 8GB built-in memory. It has a flip-out USB that plugs directly into your computer to transfer videos, upload or share with your friends. The Flip comes with a rechargeable AA battery pack and a 2-inch viewing screen. It can be connected to your TV via HDMI cable. It's dimensions are 4.25" x 2.19" x 1.17" making it truly small enough to fit in your pocket. It's ultra portable. Rubiconn uses this camcorder in-house and we love it!

"It's very cool. Very simple and easy to use. It comes with the video editing software. You can upload your videos to YouTube," Ken Miller, Rubiconn VP Sales says, "In fact, it's so easy even a CEO can use it."

Rubiconn's Favorite HDTV

Rubiconn loves the Sony Bravia HDTV! It boasts the Motionflow 240Hz Technology Screen Refresh Rate which is the best on the market. The Sony Bravia HDTV is capable of streaming instant content such as Netflix Video Streaming, Slacker Internet Radio and other Internet streaming such as YouTube, Sports Illustrated, CBS, etc.

The Sony Bravia HDTV is also equipped with an HDTV Tuner for over-the-air high-definition broadcasts (for people who don't subscribe to cable). Other features include 1080p display which provides the highest quality progressive-scan picture possible from a high definition source, a 16:9 widescreen aspect ratio and a 1920 X 1080 maximum resolution. There are 4 HDMI ports, a USB Port, an Ethernet Port, PC Video Input Port which will allow you to connect many different types of devices to your TV display.

The Sony Bravia HDTV line is a little pricey, but it is well worth the money when you take into account all of the features, capabilities and the superb quality! It's guaranteed to make your Home Theater experience excellent!

"I picked up the 40" version for my brother and loved the picture quality. Having the 240Hz refresh rate really makes a big difference," says Bill Becker, Rubiconn Senior Technician. I think we all want Mr. Becker as a brother!

Which GPS should I buy?

Which GPS should you buy? That's a tough one. There are so many brands and models to choose from. Our best advice is to always stick with a major brand. In this case, stick with Garmin, Tom Tom, or Magellan. For further information regarding various model features, check out: www.gpsmagazine.com

GPS Magazine has rated the Garmin nuvi 765T as the top GPS unit to purchase.

New map screen enhancements, features, & HotFix GPS technology, make the 765T a significant improvement over the nuvi 760. The nuvi 765T is a better bargain than the 785T. It is the best all around nuvi available today. If you don't need Bluetooth, get the nuvi 755T instead.

Just Plain COOL!

Just about every geek out there spent his/her formative years building things with Legos. Now, with these USB

Memory Brick Thumb-drives, ThinkGeek has taken a regular brick and inserted a 4 Gigabyte piece of USB flash memory. Now you can store millions of pages of text, thousands of images, hundreds of songs, or 10 hours of movies. Then, when you're done with your file storage, build it into your robot, and watch as he stomps Tokyo!

Rrraaarrrr!!! Or how about —

OPTIMUS MAXIMUS: this amazing keyboard features a tiny screen on each key... that's 113 screens in all. What can you do with these tiny screens, you ask? Well, each key can change its image dynamically depending on what you're doing. Hold down SHIFT and all keys go uppercase. Run Photoshop and you can set it so each hotkey has an image representing its function. Set a key to monitor your CPU usage or display what iTunes track

you are currently playing. You can make a key into a tiny clock with moving hands and

play animated gif files or even quicktime movies. Of course all this futuristic technology is going to cost you a pretty penny... both of these items are available at www.thinkgeek.com

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