

By Debra Littlejohn Shinder, MCSE, MVP

Now that Windows Vista has officially launched and is available to consumers, everybody's talking about it. Unfortunately, a lot of what I'm hearing—from both Windows fans and the ABM (Anybody But Microsoft) crowd—needs to be taken with a grain of salt. In many cases, what the information lacks in accuracy, it makes up for in sensationalism. But how do you sort through all the hype and get a real picture of what the new OS will and won't do for you?

In this article, I'll take a look at some of the exaggerations, distortions, and out-and-out untruths I've heard floating around about Vista.

1 You'll have to buy a new, high-end PC to run Vista

Many in the mainstream media are claiming that to run Vista, you'll almost certainly have to buy a new computer. This myth is undoubtedly being encouraged by hardware vendors, but it's not true. I was able to install Vista on my existing Dell Dimension mid-priced system with no problems, and the existing video card, an ATI x600, runs Aero Glass.

If your computer is older or a low-end machine, you can still probably install and use Vista but you may not get the Aero Glass interface. Although Glass adds a lot of "wow" factor, it's not something that's essential to getting work done. You'll still benefit from Vista's security enhancements, search functionality, and added features. If you do want the Glass look, you still may not need to buy a new system. Instead, you can add RAM to bring your system up to the 1 GB recommended for Glass and install a new video card that supports it.

Another myth I've heard is that only PCI Express (PCIe) video cards support Aero Glass, so if your computer doesn't have a PCIe slot, you're out of luck. That's not true either. Video card vendors have regular PCI cards that will run Glass. I'm running it on a system with a relatively inexpensive GeForce 5200 card with 256 MB of memory in a regular PCI slot.

If you do choose to buy a new PC, you don't need a high-end one that costs thousands of dollars to run Vista. Just a couple of days after the launch, retailers began offering machines preloaded with Vista Home Premium, complete with LCD monitors, for as low as \$600.

2 Vista will solve all your security problems

Microsoft is touting Vista's improved security, but no operating system is perfectly secure (and no OS ever will be). Running Vista doesn't mean you don't still need perimeter firewalls, antivirus protection, and other third-party security mechanisms.

Because much of operating system, including its networking technologies, has been redesigned and new code written, Vista is likely to present some vulnerabilities that weren't in older versions of the OS even as it fixes many that were. This is true of any new software and Vista, despite its focus on security and Microsoft's best efforts, is no exception.

In fact, Microsoft shipped the first critical security update for Vista over a year ago, when it was still in the beta testing stage. It will be just as important with Vista as with any other operating system to ensure that updates are installed regularly. The danger is that novice users, hearing that Vista is more secure, may let their guard down and fail to take the protective measures necessary to prevent attacks, virus infestations, etc.

3 Vista is no more secure than XP SP2

On the other hand, some of Vista's detractors have been claiming that the new operating system offers no security advantage at all. I've heard computer "experts" on the radio say that Vista is no more secure than Windows XP with Service Pack 2, and an eWeek article last summer went so far as to report that Symantec security researchers were contending that Vista "could harbor a range of vulnerabilities that will make it less secure than previous iterations of Windows."

It's true that, properly updated, Windows XP is a pretty secure OS. But Vista includes a number of new security enhancements that XP doesn't have. For example, User Account Control (UAC) in Vista protects against attacks

that rely on elevation of privileges. Internet Explorer 7, when running on Vista, leverages UAC to run in Protected Mode, which keeps Web applications from writing to system folders. IE7 doesn't run in Protected Mode on XP.

BitLocker drive encryption, available in Vista Enterprise and Ultimate versions, provides a way to keep unauthorized persons from accessing sensitive data on a stolen or lost laptop. The Windows Firewall in Vista allows you to block outgoing traffic as well as incoming. Windows service hardening reduces the potential for damage if one of Windows' services is compromised. Vista includes the Network Access Protection client, which allows administrators to restrict computers that are properly updated or don't have antivirus, anti-spyware, or firewalls from connecting to company networks.

Those are just a few of the new security improvements included in Vista.

4 The only thing new about Vista is the eye candy

Your first impression of an operating system, like your first impression when meeting another person, is often based on appearance. And Vista's appearance does make an impression. With Aero Glass turned on, the transparent window borders, 3 D animations, and other visual effects make it clear (no pun intended) that this is a whole new Windows.

However, the changes to Vista amount to more than just a pretty interface. In addition to the security improvements discussed above, many aspects of the operating system have been reworked to improve usability and provide new functionality. For example:

- The search capabilities have been greatly expanded, so that you can easily find documents, programs, and other objects, and even run applications, from a single box in the Start menu.
- New productivity applications are built into Vista, including a calendaring/task list program called Windows Calendar and a new, improved address book called Windows Contacts. Together with Windows Mail (the replacement for Outlook Express), these provide much of the same functionality as Outlook, without the need to purchase Office. There are other new built-in applications, too, such as the Snipping Tool that makes it easy to do a screen capture of any desired area without installing third-party software such as SnagIt.
- Changes to Windows Explorer make it easier to organize and view your files, with more options. For example, you can see thumbnails of all files (not just graphics) and view their contents in the preview pane without opening them, as shown in **Figure A**.

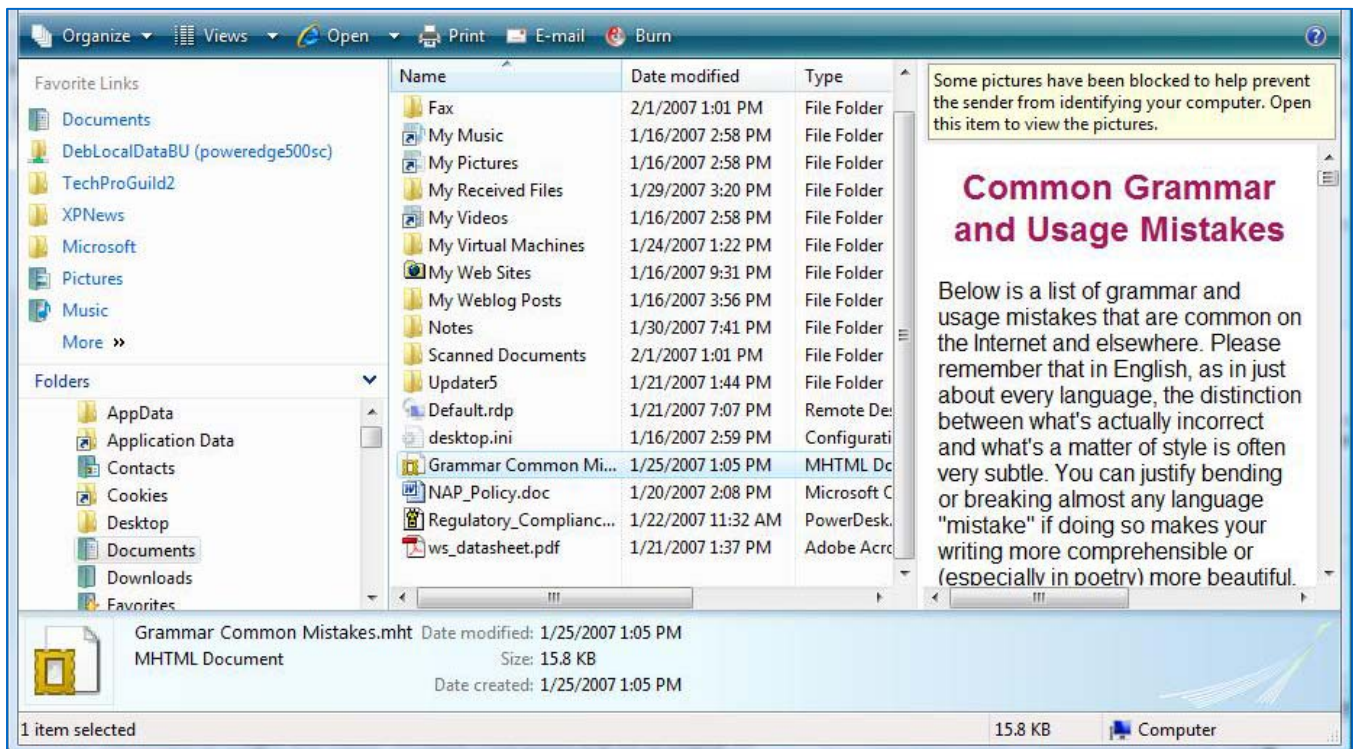


Figure A: You can preview files in Windows Explorer without opening them.

Explorer also features automatic horizontal scrolling when needed, and you can select multiple files using check boxes instead of the old method of holding down the [Ctrl] key. Many little things make the user experience less frustrating; for example, when you select to rename a file in Explorer, only the filename is changed; by default the extension remains the same.

These are only a few of the new Vista features that can be enjoyed with or without the Aero Glass interface.

5 You can't dual boot Vista with another operating system

One of the strangest and most inaccurate statements I heard was that "With Vista, you can't run two operating systems on the same computer like you could in the past." That's news to me, as I'm currently running two computers that dual boot Vista and XP. As with previous versions, a boot menu is displayed when the computer starts, and you can choose either Vista or Previous version of Windows.

Now, it is true that for some reason, on the Boot tab of the System Configuration Utility in Vista, only the Vista operating system shows up even though I can boot into XP from the boot menu. As with XP, the System Configuration Utility is accessed by typing `msconfig` at the command line. **Figure B** shows the tool.

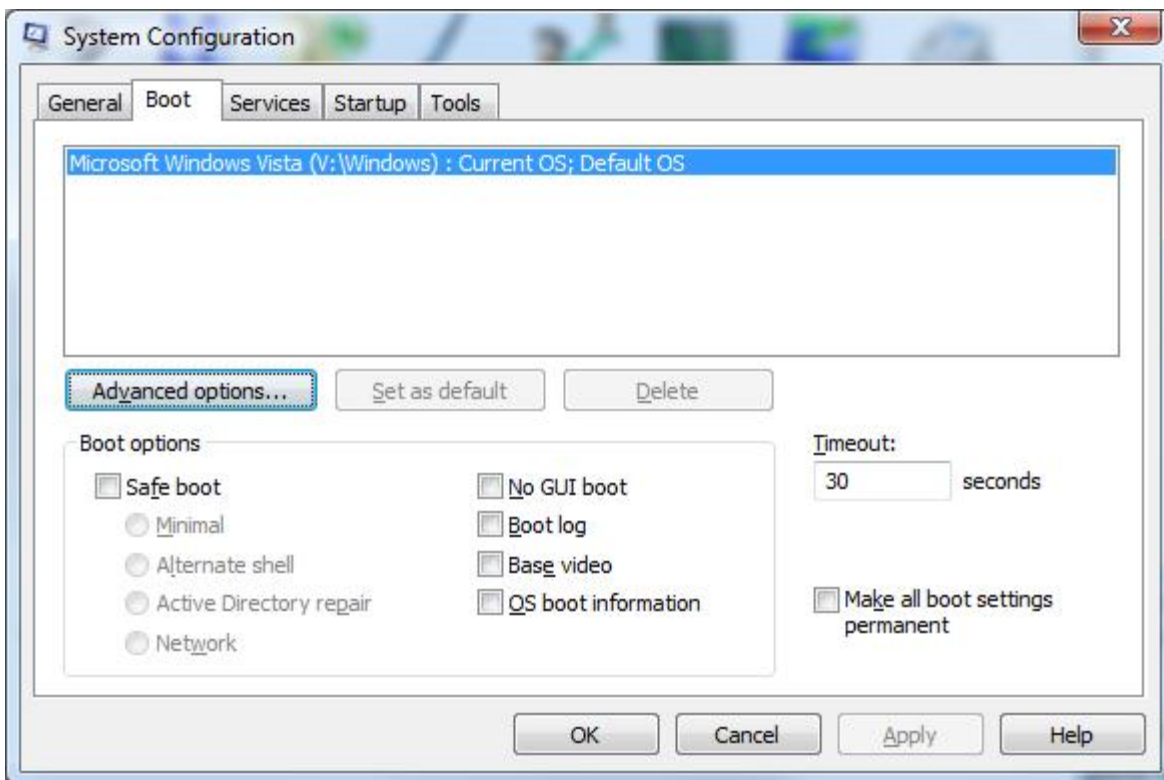


Figure B: You can dual boot Vista with another OS, but the other OS doesn't show up in the Boot tab of the System Configuration Utility.

You may also notice that the old `boot.ini` file, which was used to edit the boot configuration information in Windows NT, 2000, and XP, is missing. Now the boot options are stored in the Boot Configuration Data (BCD) store, and the system is started by the Windows Boot Manager. You use a tool called `Bcdedit.exe` to change the boot information.

6 Vista requires (or includes) Office 2007

I recently read an article in a well-respected national publication that, in listing a number of things the author didn't like about Vista, included the new "ribbon bar" in Word. Oops—that's not a Vista feature; it's a feature of Office 2007, which apparently was installed on the Vista machine he was testing.

I've also seen several references to the need to upgrade to Office 2007 when you install Vista. Well, of course you can, but it's by no means a requirement. Office 2003 runs fine on Vista. This bit of misinformation seems to be most often used in articles that inflate the projected cost to deploy Vista; you can make those numbers look higher if you add in the cost of upgrading Office, too.

Also, contrary to the rumor that Microsoft made Vista so open source competitors of its office products won't run on it, I had no problems at all installing and running Open Office, the open source alternative to Microsoft Office, shown in **Figure C**.

7 Most old applications and peripherals won't work with Vista

Circulating amongst the FUD (fear, uncertainty, and doubt) being spread about Vista is the idea that upgrading will subject you to all kinds of application incompatibilities. Some programs made for XP, especially those that hook into the kernel, like antivirus programs and some system utilities, won't work with Vista. However, the majority of applications that run on XP will also run on Vista.

In some cases, you may need to install or run older programs in Compatibility mode (right-click the program file, select Properties, and click the Compatibility tab to select compatibility options) and/or run the program as an administrator for it to work properly.

You don't have to figure out most compatibility issues for yourself. Vista comes with the Program Compatibility Assistant, which can detect what changes need to be made to run a program and resolve conflicts with UAC that may be preventing a program from running correctly. It runs automatically when it detects an older program that has compatibility issues. You can also use the Program Compatibility Wizard, a tool that you run manually from the Control Panel | Programs and Features section (in native view).

There have also been many reports about hardware peripherals, especially printers and scanners, that don't work with Vista. It's true that some hardware vendors were slow to provide Vista drivers during the Vista beta testing period. By the time Vista launched to the consumer market, though, many hardware drivers were included on the installation DVD and many more will be made available in the next few months.

My older HP OfficeJet G55 had no problems working with Vista, and if you peruse the list of supported printers (Control Panel | Printers | Add A Printer Wizard), you'll see that Vista supports a large number of printers from HP, IBM, Brother, Canon, Citizen, Dell, Epson, Fujitsu, Konica, Kyocera Mita, Lexmark, Minolta, NEC, Oki, Panasonic, Ricoh, Samsung, Sharp, Sony, Xerox, and other major printer vendors.

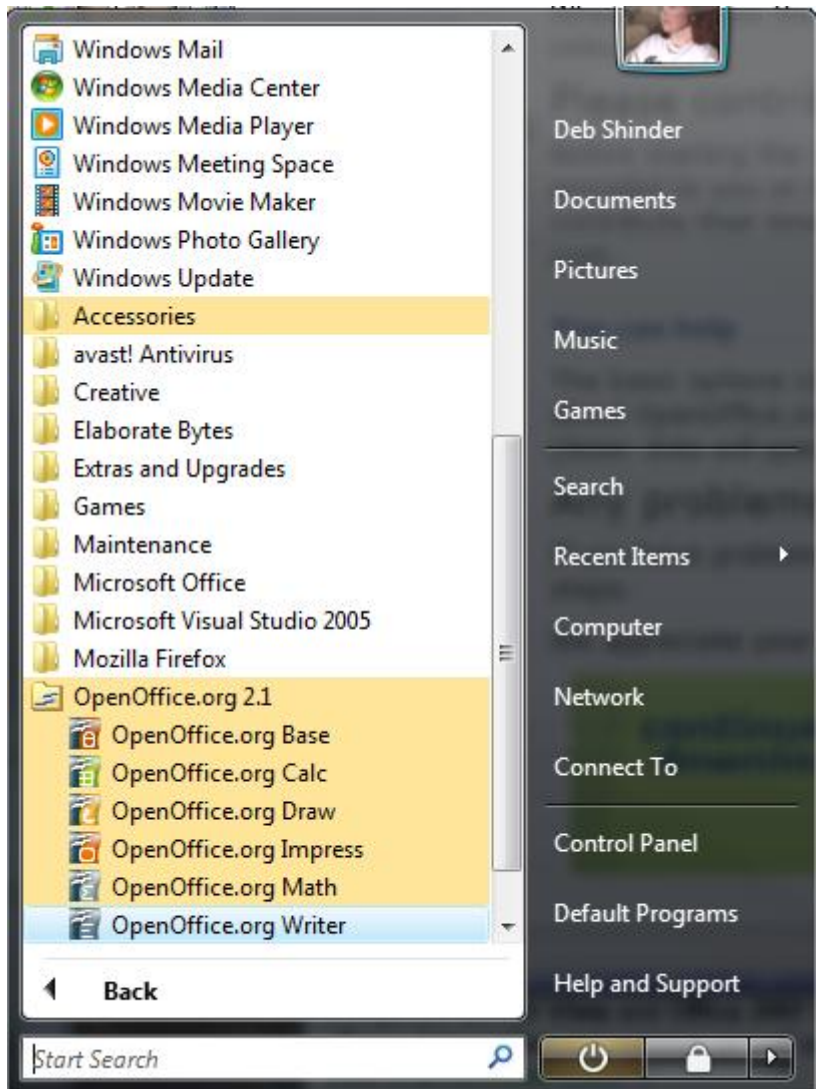


Figure C: You can install the free Open Office software on Vista if you don't want to buy Microsoft Office.

8 You have to buy a Premium version of Vista if you have a dual core machine

There was initially some confusion over the specification that Vista Home Editions support only a single processor. Some folks took this to mean that that version of Vista wouldn't run on dual core machines.

Dual core CPUs do contain two processors—but they're combined on one chip or die. This is called chip-level multiprocessing and it's different from having two separate physical processors installed on the same machine. Even though a dual core machine will show the activity of two processors in Windows performance monitoring tools (see the two separate graphs for processor activity in **Figure D**), Microsoft's definition of "processor" refers to the number of physical CPUs, not the number of cores. (This policy is laid out in "[Multicore Processor Licensing](#).")

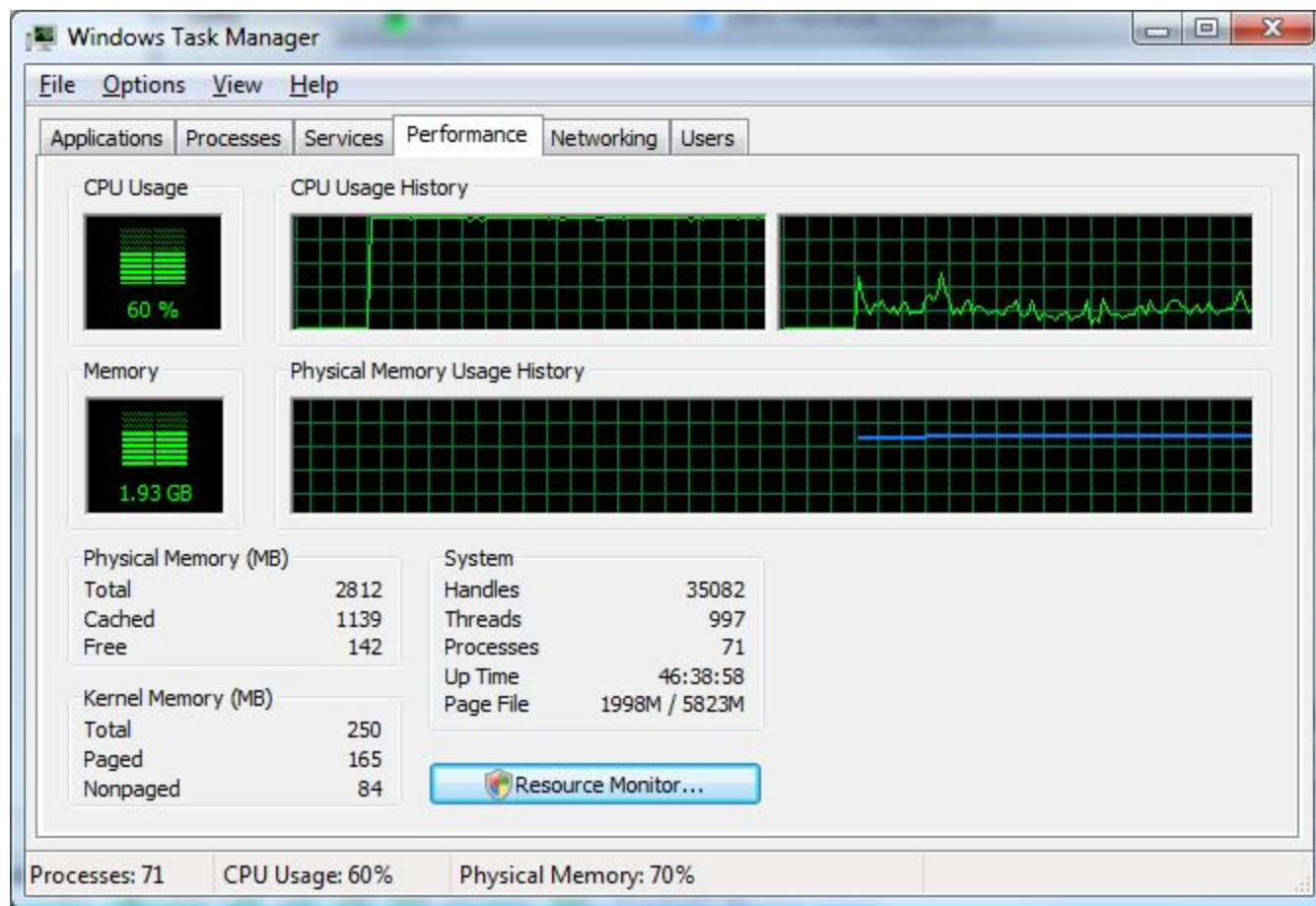


Figure D: Dual core machines show the activity of two processors in performance monitoring tools.

In fact, all versions of Vista will run on a machine with multiple processors installed—but Home Basic and Premium will recognize and use only one of the processors.

9 You won't be able to play ripped music in Vista

Have you heard about the horrors of Vista's DRM (Digital Rights Management)? Some people have implied that it will prevent you from playing any music or movie files unless you download and pay for them online. Others are speculating that even the media you do buy may be blocked.

Interestingly, the people who are spreading this one all seem to be folks who have never used Vista (and, according to many of them, never will). The real story: I have no problem playing music files that were ripped from CDs on Windows Media Player 10 or in Vista's Windows Media Center application. Yes, I legally own the CDs, but Vista has no way of knowing that. All of the media that imported from my XP Windows Media Center computer, including recorded TV programs, played without a problem. For a more thorough discussion of content protection in Vista, see [this article](#) from CreateDigitalMusic.com.

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Vista costs a lot more than XP

Ever since pricing for the various editions of Vista was announced, I've heard a lot of griping and grumbling about how much it costs. Windows XP came in only two versions that were available at retail: Home, which was priced at \$199 for the full package and \$99 for the upgrade, and Professional, which was priced at \$299 for the full package and \$199 for the upgrade.

Vista gives you many more options:

- ◆ Home Basic: \$199 full, \$99 upgrade
- ◆ Home Premium: \$239 full, \$159 upgrade
- ◆ Business: \$299 full, \$199 upgrade
- ◆ Ultimate: \$399 full, \$259 upgrade

Everyone seems to be focusing on the price for Ultimate, but if you look at the versions that are directly comparable to the two versions of XP (Home Basic and Business), you'll see that they cost exactly the same as their XP counterparts did five years ago.

Home Premium includes the Windows Media Center and Tablet PC functionality, along with Aero Glass and extra applications such as Windows Movie Maker, Windows Meeting Space, Mobility Center, and Scheduled Backup. Windows XP Media Center Edition and Tablet PC Edition weren't available at retail; you could only get them preinstalled by the OEM.

Ultimate Edition also includes Media Center and Tablet PC, along with business extras such as BitLocker encryption, Remote Desktop, and Windows Complete Backup and Restore. In fact, Ultimate includes all the home entertainment features of Home Premium plus all the corporate goodies of Business and Enterprise editions, and the upgrade to Ultimate costs only \$59 more than the XP Pro upgrade while offering a great deal more functionality.



Debra Littlejohn Shinder is a technology consultant, trainer and writer who has authored a number of books on computer operating systems, networking, and security. These include *Scene of the Cybercrime: Computer Forensics Handbook*, published by Syngress, and *Computer Networking Essentials*, published by Cisco Press. She is co-author, with her husband, Dr. Thomas Shinder, of *Troubleshooting Windows 2000 TCP/IP*, the best-selling *Configuring ISA Server 2000*, and *ISA Server and Beyond*.

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