

Extend HomeGroups to all

Windows 7 makes home media-sharing easy, but only across PCs using the same operating system. **Zack Stern** shows you how to connect with XP, Vista and Mac machines too

Windows 7's HomeGroups feature simplifies sharing files and printers across a network. But it only lets you connect to files and printers using a group password if all the PCs on the network run Windows 7. Since we're not all Windows 7 converts, HomeGroups isn't as useful as it ought to be. Here, we look at workarounds to make a Windows 7 PC play nicely on a network with Mac, XP and Vista PCs.

To set up a printer on a Windows 7 PC for sharing on a cross-platform home network, go to Start and choose 'Open Devices and Printers'. Double-click your printer's icon and choose 'Customize your printer'. Click the Sharing tab in the next window, then select 'Share this printer'.

Unless the setup is for several similar PCs, skip the option to download additional printer drivers to the host system. With different combinations of 32bit and 64bit XP, Vista and Windows 7, it's far easier to set up the printer on each PC separately.

Share a printer in XP or Vista

You also need to configure XP and Vista to connect to the printer on your Windows 7 PC. In Vista, open the Printers Control Panel and right-click your printer. Select Sharing, 'Change sharing options'. Click Continue, then select 'Share this printer'. Click Ok. In XP, open the Printers and Faxes control panel, right-click your printer and choose 'Share this printer'. Click Ok.

In Windows 7, the process for connecting to a shared printer is the same regardless

of which operating system the PC it's hooked up to runs. Go to Start and choose 'Devices and Printers'. Select 'Add a printer' and click the second option to add a network printer. Find your printer in the list and click Next. Windows 7 will locate the printer driver. You can make this the default printer if you wish; otherwise, click Finish.

Windows 7 may not automatically locate the driver for an older printer. In this case, head to the printer manufacturer's website and download one when prompted. If this doesn't help, you may need to install the driver before connecting to the printer.

Use a Win 7 printer in XP or Vista

After installing a printer on a Windows 7 PC, you can still connect to it using XP or Vista. In XP, open the 'Printers and Faxes' control panel. Choose File, Add Printer, and click Next. Click the button to add a network printer, then click Next. Click 'Connect to this printer' and type the path to the printer.

In our example, the printer is called **Epson_R1800** and the PC is called **Sloth**, so the printer path is `\\Sloth\Epson_R1800`. This information can be found by opening Windows Explorer on the Windows 7 PC and choosing the Network menu on the left. Browse to your PC and locate the printer there to identify the PC and printer name. On the XP system, click Next.

Enter your username and password for the Windows 7 PC. To connect automatically in the future, leave the 'Remember my password box' ticked. Click Ok, Yes, Finish.

In Vista, open the Printers control panel and double-click Add Printer. Choose the second option to add a network printer, then click Next. Vista should find the printer automatically; select it, then click Next. Head to the manufacturer's website if you need to manually find the printer driver; otherwise, decide whether you want to set the printer as the default and click Next, Finish.

Share a Win 7 printer with Mac

Mac OS X can reach a shared Windows 7 printer just as an XP or Vista PC can. We had problems connecting a Mac running OS X 10.6 with the default SMB protocol because of some new networking architecture in Windows 7, but it's easy enough to use the Line Printer Daemon (LPD) standard to share a printer.

On the Windows 7 PC, open the Programs control panel and select 'Turn Windows features on or off'. Double-click 'Print and Document Services' and activate the 'LPD Print Service'. Click Ok.

On the Mac, click the Apple menu and choose System Preferences, Print & Fax. Click the plus icon to add a new printer. Right-click the toolbar in the Add Printer box that pops up and select Customize Toolbar. Drag the Advanced button into the toolbar and click Done.

Click Advanced and choose 'LDB/LPR Host or Printer' as the Type. Enter the printer path. Click 'Select Printer Software' in the Print Using menu. Select your printer in the list and click Ok, Add.

Share a Mac printer with Windows 7

Windows 7 PCs can also connect to a Mac OS X printer over the network. On the Mac, click the Apple Menu and choose System Preferences, Sharing. Select Printer Sharing and choose your printer.

On the Windows 7 PC, click Start, 'Devices and Printers', 'Add a printer'. Next, choose 'The printer that I want isn't listed'. Enter the printer path. Our Mac is called **Felix** and the printer is called **Epson Stylus Photo R1800**, so we entered the path `\\Felix\Epson Stylus Photo R1800`. Click Next. Follow the prompts to finish the installation.

Set up Windows 7 to share files

Windows 7 lets you share files through a combination of its public folders and manual selection. To share files with everyone on your network, simply move them to the public location within any of the Libraries in the left pane of a window.

Alternatively, you can share files or folders wherever they happen to reside. Start by selecting an item to share, then click the 'Share with' menu at the top of the window. Choose 'HomeGroup (Read)' to let people on your home network open but not modify files, or 'HomeGroup (Read/Write)' to let people open and edit files.

Choose 'Specific people' if you want to restrict access to certain user accounts. If you haven't already done so, you'll need to create a new login and password for each person to whom you intend to grant access to these files. To do so, go to Control Panel,

click 'User Accounts and Family Safety', then select 'Add or remove user accounts'. Click 'Manage another account', then choose 'Create a new account'.

Follow the prompts to create a Standard user account. Choose the account and click 'Create a password'. To add a new account to the list, select 'Share with', 'Specific people', click the drop-down arrow and make the appropriate selection.

Next, try connecting to specific files that you want to share. If your PC is in the same HomeGroup as another Windows 7 PC, open a new window and look in the HomeGroup area on the left. Choose the PC and browse the shared libraries inside.

If the other machine isn't connected through a Windows 7 HomeGroup, you can find it by browsing through the Network tab on the left pane.

Share files between Vista and XP

XP and Vista can happily share files with a Windows 7 PC. To share files on the network from an XP PC, drag them into the Shared Documents folder. You can also activate sharing manually at the file locations.

Right-click the file or folder that you want to share, select 'Sharing and Security', then tick 'Share this folder on the network'. To enable others to add or modify content, tick 'Allow network users to change my files'. Click Ok. To turn off sharing, open that same menu and deselect it.

In Vista, you can copy files to your Public folder to share with anyone on the network.

To share items selectively, right-click the file or folder and choose Share. From the drop-down menu, select the user account for each person who should have access. Click Share.

To retrieve files that a Windows 7 PC hosts, use the Network browser within XP or Vista.

Share files between Mac and Win 7

A Mac running OS X can share or retrieve files with Windows 7, although setting this up takes a couple of extra steps.

Click the Apple menu and choose System Preferences, Network. Find and select your network connection in the left pane, then choose Advanced. Click the WINS tab, enter your Windows 7 PC's Workgroup name and click Ok, Apply.

Next, head to System Preferences, Sharing and tick File Sharing. Click Options, then choose 'Share files and folders using SMB (Windows)'. Tick the option to enable sharing for your user account. To add more locations, click the plus icon.

If the Mac doesn't appear in the Network area on your Windows 7 system, enter the computer name into Windows Explorer. Since our shared Mac is called **Felix**, we typed `\\Felix`. Enter your username and password to connect to the files.

You can browse shared Windows 7 files in Mac OS X, too. On the Mac, open the Finder, choose Go, 'Connect to Server' and enter the remote PC's SMB file path. Since our Windows 7 PC is called **Sloth**, we typed `smb://Sloth`. Finally, enter your login name and password. ☑

