

EGUIDE - RUNNING ON BORROWED TIME: WHY BUSINESSES MUST FINALLY LET GO OF WINDOWS XP

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INTRODUCTION

The clock has been ticking on Windows XP for sometime now but many small and midsize businesses (SMBs) have stubbornly stuck with the operating system (OS). They've done this through 13 years and three releases of expected successors.

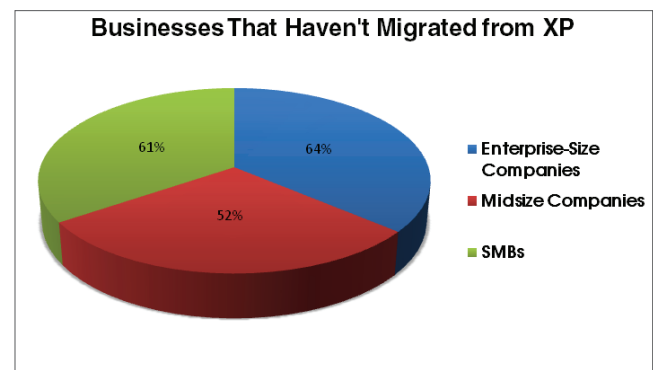
With so many businesses still clinging to XP machines for their day-to-day operations, Microsoft was caught in a conundrum after the Windows Vista debacle of 2007. Since the Vista release was so horribly received, businesses were reluctant to migrate to any new operating system upon the Windows 7 and Windows 8 releases. Knowing that so many businesses were content with the tried-and-true XP as their OS, Microsoft continued to support it.

However, that's all about to change...

Tuesday April 8th, 2014 is the end of XP as

we've known it. On this date, Microsoft is set to officially halt all Windows XP support services. A Service Pack 3 (SP3) will be introduced to announce that XP users will no longer receive security updates. Additionally, support options such as free or paid online technical content updates will cease to exist.

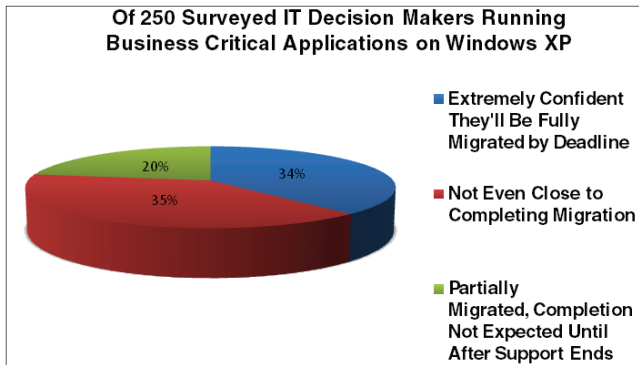
Microsoft is pressed to move forward in 2014 despite the fact that many businesses haven't. Here is some concerning data from a recent VMware study.



Thankfully, many of those surveyed did answer that they've started the migration process. For the time being, it appears most are upgrading to Windows 7 rather than Windows 8.

That said, a VMware and Dell sponsored survey of 250 IT decision makers for midsize businesses painted a bleak outlook for even those businesses in the process of migrating right now.

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There are most likely two prevailing questions on the mind of any SMB reading this who has yet to begin this process or won't have it completed by the deadline.

What will happen to my business on April 8th if I am still running XP?

What are the challenges of beginning this migration process now?

EMBRACING THIS NOW INEVEITABLE CHANGE

Some SMBs may think why upgrade at all?

They may feel XP is a great operating system and have no desire whatsoever to switch. As long as the hardware the OS is running on performs satisfactorily, why not ride it out? Even when support is lost, doesn't everything live online forever? Surely someone is archiving database articles? Workable solutions to a variety of problems will still be found in message board forums, right?

Not so quick. Running an outdated Windows OS with absolutely no support gives attackers and spammers free reign

on XP endpoints. Without Microsoft around to investigate new attacks, find a patch, and minimize its severity, businesses that continue to run XP will have full exposure every single day they conduct business.

Although Microsoft has recently extended XP anti-malware updates through July 2015, attackers are eagerly waiting for April 8th to take advantage of other expected vulnerabilities.

Most businesses cite cost of implementation as the main reason they've yet to make the switch. OS migration can cost as much as \$1205 to \$1999 per machine. This may seem like a big financial undertaking but consider the price you'll pay when someone accesses your system with malicious intent once Microsoft's XP support is gone.

Furthermore, even upgraded machines and devices in your network are susceptible to infection from older machines running an outdated OS.

Expect disrupted and severely compromised operations once applications running XP are no longer supported. Here a few considerations:

- Newer versions of Internet Explorer with security enhancements won't be supported by Windows XP
- Protection against Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs) and Object-

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Based Viruses is limited since some anti-virus software will no longer support Windows XP

- Older printer and video drivers will be exposed to attacks since patches are no longer provided.

STAFF BENEFITS OF MIGRATION AND UPGRADES

It's easy to see that the burden carried by your in-house IT support gets heavier the longer XP is used beyond the deadline with no support. That is if you even have internal IT staff.

The good news for those businesses migrating or upgrading to Windows 7 is that users of this OS report fewer virus attacks, much quicker repair time, fewer help desk hours per PC each year, less instances of lost productivity, and fewer monthly reboots. In many ways, Windows 7 has become the spiritual successor to XP – efficient, stable and reliable.

THREE CHALLENGES OF WINDOWS XP MIGRATION

By now, you understand that migrating from Windows XP to Win7 or Win8 is no longer a choice; it's a business critical necessity. That said, SMBs must also anticipate some roadblocks along the way. Here are three common challenges with any Windows operating system migration:

Incompatible Hardware

Some machines will need nothing more than a simple OS upgrade rather than migrated to new hardware. Older machines running sluggishly with XP will need to be replaced. XP strains resources much less than Windows 7, so any machine that is already having a difficult time will need to be replaced.

Incompatible Software

It's not uncommon for the business critical applications and software you're running on XP to be incompatible with Win7 or Win8. Be sure to update software/application licenses prior to migration. If the new OS doesn't support existing applications, consider VMware or Microsoft Hyper-V to run these applications on a virtual machine.

Data Loss

Although your data and files are supposed to remain intact with an OS upgrade, use image-based backup software to backup the entire contents of your machine. Save this backup to a virtual hard disk for an instantly bootable virtual machine to recover old files, folders, and data if something goes awry.

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GET SUPPORT

When migrating to a new operating system, making the process as easy and problem-free as possible should always be the primary goal. With this in mind, Managed Service Providers (MSPs) can be an undeniable asset when it comes to ensuring a successful transition and eliminating some very common headaches and annoyances. Particularly, when it comes to the troublesome application and hardware hiccups that typically accompany migration.

A MSP can alleviate much of the hassle of migrating from Windows XP by ensuring proper planning and execution. With a MSPs expert Microsoft and Windows knowledge, SMBs can add some critical pre-game aspects to the migration process such as:

System Assessment: Before proceeding with a system upgrade, it's vital to identify which computers and devices will be part of the upgrade, how to prepare them, and what business applications will be impacted the most by this migration. The MSP gets a true feel for the core of your IT infrastructure and the mix of hardware and software applications your business depends on each day. This allows them to lay out a much more effective migration plan.

Migration Strategy: After the system assessment is completed, your MSP can start piecing together your migration strategy. This strategy will most likely include fine-tuning hardware for optimal performance, readying applications for deployment, and backing up data from old machines that are being replaced.

Your MSP has the ability to complete much of this migration with the help of smart automated tools used for compatibility testing, backups, and other processes. This lessens pressure on your existing IT staff who have never managed an organizational migration from XP to Win 7 or 8. These automation tools make it far faster, easier, and more efficient to migrate from XP to a new operating system.

SUMMARY

For the sake of security, SMBs must finally let go of Windows XP and migrate to Win7 or Win8. Those migrating to Win7 can rest assured that this operating system is the true heir apparent to Windows XP after the poorly received Windows Vista release.

Win7 boasts more reliability, enhanced security, and fewer instances of lost productivity. Just keep in mind that any old sluggish hardware will most likely need to be replaced since it will not be able to handle Win7.

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Leveraging the expertise and automated tools of a managed services provider will contribute to a near seamless transition and a peaceful climb up the Windows ladder.

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