Upgrade paths, and alternatives
End of Support for Windows XP, Office versions

rev 2014-04-03

Overview: Microsoft is ending support for certain products as of April 8, 2014, including Windows XP, and Office 2003. (Support for previous versions of these products has already ended). This means there will be no more security updates or technical support for the Windows XP operating system, but it does *not* mean it will stop working, lock users out, or that user data will necessarily be lost.

Windows Security: Without critical Windows XP security updates, a PC may become vulnerable to harmful viruses, spyware, and other malicious software (malware) which can steal or damage data. Anti-virus (also called anti-malware) software will also not be able to fully protect you once Windows XP itself is unsupported. This does *not* mean that existing anti-virus-malware products installed on Windows XP will stop working, but it may mean that the developers of those anti-virus programs may stop providing the latest virus-malware “Most Wanted List” to those products, so they could become less and less effective over time. For more details, see:
http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/enterprise/endofsupport.aspx

Upgrading operating system on existing hardware and programs: Windows 8 is the latest upgrade available for Windows XP machines at present. Pricing is about $100. (Upgrade from Windows 8 to version 8.1 is a free download). To determine which portions of hardware and software on an existing machine are compatible with Windows 8, one can use Microsoft Upgrade Assistant. This free Microsoft download scans your PC, desktop apps, and connected devices to see if they'll work with a later version of Windows, and then provides a free compatibility report. For more details, see:
http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-8/upgrade-assistant-download-online-faq
http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/help/what-does-end-of-support-mean

Non-Microsoft operating systems: New competitors to Microsoft Windows appear each year (Linux, Apple, et al). Linux-based operating systems are far lower priced; some are open-source, provided free by established developers. Most will run on hardware that previously ran Windows XP. Apple operating systems and computers, while of excellent quality, are generally priced significantly higher than Windows machines, with a far fewer hardward choices. Many competitive operating systems behave similarly enough to Windows, that nimble users make the transition with satisfaction. Linux operating systems provide nearly all the features of Microsoft Windows, but are less “automatic” when being installed, and upgraded. Apple operating systems are quite easy to install and automatically upgrade. Apple and Linux operating systems are generally *more* secure than Windows; many users choose to not install anti-virus-malware software at all, due to the small risk. Finding software drivers for non-mainstream peripherals, such as odd printers, may be difficult. Some non-mainstream applications, including specialized accounting and bookkeeping software, may not be available in versions for Linux and Apple. A majority of the world’s websites are served from Linux servers. Many large businesses run applications on Linux. Apple Computers is a large, well-known company

due to its successful iPhone business, but the installed base of Apple computer workstations, is but a small fraction of the worldwide base.

Upgrading to a later operating system on new hardware and programs: Lowest total cost of ownership for business users, is usually to upgrade hardware and operating system together. As this may involve purchasing newer versions of some applications (such as office productivity software - Microsoft Office or similar), the cost of computer with operating system, may be less than half of the transition cost.

Upgrading to later Office productivity programs: Newer versions of some applications (such as office productivity software - Microsoft Office, which contains Word, Outlook, Excel, etc), provides more features and security, than previous versions. However, these new versions present some training challenges, additional visual complexity, and purchase costs that can exceed the new hardware. Windows 8 contains a basic email app, and a basic calendar app is available, so Office is not be required by all users. Costs for the latest versions of Office range from $140 - $400. For more details, see:
http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/buy/compare-microsoft-office-products-FX102898564.aspx

Office 365, Software as a Service: One approach to managing these costs, and maintaining the latest versions it to lease Software as a Service (SAS) versions of these products, such as Office365, at just a few dollars per month, per user. **Office365 delivers built-in collaboration features** that may be especially useful for multi-employee businesses. These include free in-cloud storage for user data. Since SAS applications depend on fast, highly available internet connections, they are best considered in the context of terrestrial broadband connections (DSP, cable, T-1 or better). Satellite or other through-the-air connections between worker premises (office or home) and Internet Service Provider (ISP) may provide unsatisfactory service for SAS applications. (Wi-Fi connections between the premises and the workstation are usually fast and secure enough to allow SAS). For more details, see:
http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/business/what-is-office-365-for-business-FX102997580.aspx
http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/products/compare-microsoft-office-products-FX104165233.aspx

Non-Microsoft Office productivity programs: New competitors to Microsoft Office appear each year. Most are far lower priced; some are open-source, provided free by established developers; Apache Open Office is one of these. While these applications do not provide all the features of Microsoft Office, their feature set, and security are adequate for many users. File compatibility with Microsoft Office, while not perfect, is adequate for nearly all documents and spreadsheets. For more details, see:
http://www.openoffice.org/why/index.html

Non-Microsoft web browsers: While continuing to use a Windows XP workstation is feasible for careful operators, Microsoft Windows Explorer versions beyond 9 will not be available for Windows XP. Hence, browsing the internet will become less and less secure with the obsolete versio nof Windows Explorer. A great proportion of Windows malware exploits are obtained by user web browsing behavior. Fortunately, several good free web browsers exist, and continue to be updated by their developers. These include FireFox,

Safari, Mozilla, etc.

Non-Microsoft email programs: A great proportion of Windows malware exploits are obtained via nefarious email attachments. Using a non-Microsoft email application greatly reduces the risk of email, and address-book exploits, because most are designed to exploit a Microsoft email application. For email users without complex needs, or high expectations of privacy, another risk reduction technique is to use free email account(s) from Google, Yahoo, and the like. These can be accessed from within an email application, or via webmail. In these cases, the email provider (Google, Yahoo, etc) does a good enough job of protecting users from malware-laden email exploits, that risk is greatly reduced. A live internet connection is required to access email using a web browser (webmail), but that does not mean that local storage of email messages cannot be configured.

We are ready to assist you with transitioning your operating system, exploration of alternatives, selection of hardware, and training. For all your computer needs, contact us: 4ReliableComputers.Net