

XP'S BIG EXIT

Monthly Plugged In columnist Renato Sogueco welcomes guest author and retail florist Paul Brockway, who offers some straightforward "next steps" in anticipation of Windows' April 2014 break away from the XP operating system.

> Do you have a shop full of Windows XP computers? Come April, those computers could become a major liability. That's because, as of April 8, Microsoft will no longer support Windows XP, the second most popular operating system on the planet. The change will make using just one XP workstation a threat to the security of your entire network, due to the threat of malicious attacks, data breaches and malware. In addition, if you're using XP after April 8, your shop will be out of PCI compliance (credit card security rules.)

What's a florist to do? Upgrade or replace. The choice you make depends on myriad factors: your computer skills, budget, the applications you need, and your POS vendor requirements, among many others.

Option 1: Upgrade from XP to Windows 7 or 8

An upgrade may be your best option if you have loads of hands-on experience with a PC or a newer machine (2008

or later) full of data and software, along with the original software install disks. In addition to purchasing Windows 7 or 8, you'll likely need to upgrade your system memory and graphics card. You may also need a back-up copy of your data and software on an external hard drive or in the cloud. Expect to spend \$200 to \$400 per work station, plus labor.

Option 2: Replace your Computers

Replacing is the best long-term option. Computer prices have come down substantially since you purchased your XP machine and, with a new model, you will have a faster, cleaner tool for quite a while (Microsoft support for Windows 7 goes through January 2020.) Cost is the big deterrent here. In addition to the computer, or computers, you'll need to take into account POS system requirements. Remember too that newer computers (2010 and later) may not include a parallel printer port. If you have receipt printers that connect to the PC with a parallel cable, you will have to add print server hardware (\$40-plus) or a new printer (\$300-plus.) If you need to transfer or replace software for other applications, you will need to factor those costs in as well.



RETROFITTING OLD WITH NEW

When you buy a new computer, in order to continue using your old printers that came with your POS system, you'll need this printer server hardware.

Option 3: Replace your Windows PC with a Linux

If you have machines that function primarily as a POS workstation with a terminal program and a browser, a Linux workstation may be an option. For less than \$300 you can get a computer with Linux, a PCI-compliant operating system, a terminal emulation program and a Firefox browser. If your computing needs go beyond a basic POS terminal, you can add in free apps for an email client, basic word processing and spreadsheet options, among other choices. Again, you will need to address the receipt printer connection issue, as a parallel port is not usually provided.

For most of us, the best solution will likely involve a combination of all three options. For instance, my shop needs to upgrade 15 computers. We purchased Linux computers to replace our RTI POS cash registers — that includes a PuTTY terminal emulation program and a Firefox browser (to show customers our website designs) and a receipt printer print server for only \$275. We will upgrade several of our newer computers (hardware and software) to Windows 7 and replace our older machines with new machines. 🌿

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YOUR XP END OF DAYS LIST

Here's a step-by-step list that will help you come up with a post-XP plan:

1. **Run the Windows Update Advisor** on every XP computer you have: microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=20
Do that today. This process will give you details about which hardware will need to be replaced in order to support Windows 7/8.
2. **Contact your POS vendor** and ask them for their upgrade recommendations. What version of Windows do they suggest? Can their software be run on Linux? Will your receipt printer need to be replaced? Some systems may have these costs built into the monthly maintenance fees.
3. **Start upgrading/replacing computers** as soon as your budget allows; aim to have everything in place before April. With the advent of more persistent computer viruses and related spyware and other malware, operating with an unsupported operating system is just not good business.

Finally, if you are uncomfortable with the concepts mentioned above, seek help from a tech-savvy friend, advisor or employee. Purchasing a brand new POS terminal can be a "plug and play" process, but updating hardware and software and negotiating data transfers often require some assistance. — P.B.

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