

Tips, Tricks and Advice from your local “IT Guru”

This month I want to talk to you about Windows 8 (again!). Now that Windows XP is officially unsupported, lots of people have been asking me if it is simple to upgrade to Microsoft latest operating system, and if it is hard to learn. The answer is... yes and no! Windows 8 is a bit of a shock when you first see it: gone is the nice simple desktop and the familiar Windows Start menu. Instead, you are presented with what Microsoft is calling the Modern Interface, and what most techy people still call the Metro Interface. This is a tile-based interface, and is common to Windows, Windows phone, and the Xbox games console. Basically, instead of icons on a desktop, you have various sized tiles that rollover to show application related information. So, on the 'email' tile you will have things such as the number of new emails that have arrived, and maybe the subject line of the first few. On the 'people' tile you will see pictures of your contacts, and on something like the Facebook tile you might see pictures your friend have recently posted. It sounds a bit odd when it's being described, but it makes sense when you see it. Microsoft say that with a quick glance, you should be able to see if anything new is happening or if anything requires your attention. In this respect, I think it works quite well. In truth, the original Windows interface has been reimagined into something more suited for a touchscreen device. This means that on a tablet or a phone it is particularly intuitive and provides the right amount of information at a glance. Windows 8 has a bit of a split personality though, and the old desktop is still there for those that still use a keyboard and mouse. This has made things a little messy, and it's not quite as clear-cut as it should be. Luckily, Windows has a few tricks up its sleeve. With the release of Windows 8.1, Microsoft backpedalled to make things easier for people used to the old system: the system can load straight to the desktop, newly installed apps are easier to find, and they sort off brought back the Start Button! With the latest update, which should be readily available through Windows Update by the time that you're reading this, the operating system will be far more like the Windows of old.

The bad news is that the move from XP to Windows 8 is not as simple as it should be. Firstly, it's expensive! Microsoft have decided not to offer any incentives to upgrade, so you are looking at something £85-£100 to buy the new operating system. At a time where most other companies are offering free upgrades, such as Apple, this seems a bit mean. It's in Microsoft's best interest to get everyone onto a more modern system. So, a discounted offer would have been the least that they could do! Apparently not. Secondly, there is no simple upgrade path. You can't just stick a disk in, or download a program and upgrade. Instead, you have to wipe everything and start again. Given that most hardware still running XP is probably going to be at least five years old, I guess that they can be forgiven for thinking most people would take the opportunity to just buy a new system, but it would have been nice to have the option of an upgrade.

Ultimately though, if you stick with Microsoft you'll find that within a week of using Windows 8 you will wonder what all the fuss was about. Windows is really only a means to get to your applications and data, and once you are in Microsoft Word, a browser, or reading your email, things will be much the same as they used to be.

If you have any questions or anything you would like me to cover in this column, email me at look@4-11consultants.co.uk

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