

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

This month I want to talk to you about Windows XP. This operating system was released in 2001 and has been through hundreds of updates and three major service packs in its lifetime. It is probably the most popular PC operating system so far, and is still in use on millions of PCs to this day. However, on the 8th of April 2014, Microsoft is finally, after a few false starts, ending support for it. I say false starts because Microsoft tried to end support a while ago but due to the sheer amount of people still using it, and the disaster that was Windows Vista, they extended the supported time period by a couple of years. But now, in an effort to move everyone onto a more modern system, they are enforcing the end date. What does this mean for you, the user? It doesn't mean that on the 9th of April your PC will suddenly stop working. Everything will carry on ticking along for years, if you want it to, so it's not a major concern. What it does mean is that there will be no more service packs or fixes. Again, this isn't a huge problem, as most of the known bugs have long since been remedied. Far more important is the fact that there won't be any more security updates. This is a potentially dangerous situation. If the bad guys find a vulnerability in the O/S somewhere, maybe allowing them access to your system or to gain the ability to take control of it, there will be no fixes from Microsoft. Sure, anti-virus and anti-malware programs will still protect you (as long as the software companies keep supporting their products), but there is no doubt that your systems will become much more open to attacks after support is ended, potentially risking data loss or something much worse.

So, what do you need to do? First off, if you never connect your system to the outside world, then you're good. You can keep using the computer without any worries for as long as the thing keeps going. But, if you do use the internet or receive any sort of data from an external source, then I think its time to consider moving on. If you are running XP on a modern system, say something less than four years old, then upgrading to Windows 8 is an option. This will cost under a £100, give your system a new lease of life, and extend it's usefulness for at least a year or so. Yes, it's a pain as there is no easy upgrade path - you can't just stick a disk in and set it going. You have to back everything up, wipe the system, and reinstall everything from scratch. This means you need to find all those old CDs and install codes for any programs that you need. However, after all the work, it will give you a faster, modern, and much more secure computer for much less than the cost of a new system. If you have a PC any older than four years, then I really think it's time to bite the bullet and buy a completely new system. The difference between a new PC running Windows 8 and an eight year old system with XP is night and day; everything will be faster, more stable, and much more useable. You still have to go through the pain of transferring all your old stuff and there is the learning curve for a new system, but in the end I assure you... it's worth it.

Whichever option you choose, there is no need to panic and rush into something - you still have six months! Plan the transition to your new system, making sure that you have all the codes, passwords, and disks that you need. More importantly, make sure that you have all your data backed up somewhere safe before you start, and you should be okay.

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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