Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

We all know Microsoft makes money by selling software. Have you ever looked at the policies they've developed to try to get you to part with your money? Let's look at the current operating systems, Windows XP, Windows Vista, and Windows 7. Microsoft released Windows XP in October 2001, Windows Vista in January 2007, and Windows 7 in October 2009. Then there are the old obsolete operating systems; Windows 3.1, Windows 95, Windows 98, Windows 98 Second Edition, and Windows Millennium. If Microsoft had to provide unending support for all these operating systems they would probably use most of the profits from the sale of these products to support an ever decreasing customer base. It's been said Microsoft wants to release a new operating system every three years. Based on their current support policy, which will be discussed later, they would not want to go more than five years. So, Microsoft is not out of line with other companies that manufacture products. Sooner or later they all have to drop support for the old products. The thing that angers most people about Microsoft is the replacement rate, cost, and proprietary nature of the product. Most people don't buy a new coffee maker because a new model appears on the store shelf. They use the coffee maker until it stops working, can't be repaired at a reasonable cost, and then purchase a new model. Furthermore, they can elect to purchase a different brand of coffee maker. Microsoft' support policy tries to get you to replace a perfectly good operating system (or program) with the latest version in order to receive continued support. In some cases they force people to purchase a new computer because the new product won't work on the old computer. It's not a good idea to spend very much money on an old computer.

What is Microsoft's support policy for operating systems? Simply stated, five years for consumer versions and ten years for business versions. The first five years for all versions is called Mainstream support. The second five years of support for the business versions is called Extended support. Consumer versions do not qualify for Extended support. During the first five years everyone receives Microsoft's full support. During the Extended period for the business versions, full support is not provided. Keeping the operating system up to date and safe is about it unless you pay for extra support options. Like many product support issues, there are other factors that need to be considered. With Microsoft the release date of a new operating system or service pack can change the support period. For those of you using Windows XP, you're benefiting from a unique situation. When Microsoft agreed to let the manufacturers of net books install Windows XP they had to extend the support period beyond the original end of support date. As a result you'll continue to receive support until April 8, 2014 if you have Service Pack3 installed. For those of you using Windows Vista (Home Basic, Home Premium, and

Ultimate) with Service Pack 2 installed, your support will end April 10, 2012. End of support for Windows 7 (Starter, Home Basic, Home Premium, and Ultimate) is currently scheduled for January 13. 2015. It's not likely that Microsoft will release a Service Pack 3 for Windows Vista so the April 10, 2012 is probably a date you can bet on. Microsoft is currently working on Windows 8 but very little information is being leaked. Rumors have suggested the release date will be sometime in 2012 to maintain their three year release cycle.

For those of you thinking about or are forced to purchasing a new Windows 7 computer in the near future, consider this. If you purchase online from the major computer manufactures you can customize the configuration and have them install Windows 7 Professional. It will cost approximately $100 to upgrade from Windows 7 Home Premium. Windows 7 Professional (also Enterprise) is considered a business versions of the operating system and qualify for Extended support. So, for approximately $100 you will receive Microsoft support until the currently scheduled date of January 14, 2020. Are there major differences between Windows 7 Home Premium and Windows 7 Professional? No, they're almost identical except for three additional features found in the Professional version – Windows XP Mode (allows you to run older business and productivity programs that require Windows XP), connect to a corporate network, and copy a full system backup and restore to a home or business network.

You purchased a new computer, now what do you do with your old computer? The two obvious options are; recycle or donate. If you want to recycle, take it to the Convenience Center in Bentonville. More information is available on the Special Announcements page of the Club's web site. If there's personal information on the hard drive, remove the drive, beat it with a big hammer, and then stuff it back in the case. If you want to donate the computer, don't remove the hard drive. Who wants to spend several hundred dollars for a hard drive and operating system for an old computer? If you format the hard drive, it's going to cost around $100 to purchase an operating system and hours on the Internet searching for hardware drivers. If you have a recovery/restore disk, you could run that. Now the computer will look just like it did the day you took it out of the box. The problem with this option is that someone is going to spend a couple of days updating the operating system and loading programs. The best option is to search the hard drive and delete your personal information.

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Here's hoping all of you have a very happy holiday season and a great 2011. We'll be looking for you back here on January 10th for the first question and answer session of the year. Be writing down the questions you want to submit the panel of experts.

You might want to place a reminder on your calendar, there will not be an Open House Help Clinic on Saturday, January 1st.

The editor of the Bits and Bytes is still looking for suggestions. If you have a topic you would like to see covered in the newsletter, add it to the Suggested Topics for Bits and Bytes Articles sheet located on the table at the back of the room.

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? If you're a Club member stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. If you're not a Club member you're welcome to join the Club and take advantage of this service.