

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 191: The Imminent Death of XP?

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Recently I received an email with the following question.

I'm wondering what your plans are to deal with the loss of support for Microsoft XP and discontinuation of Security Essentials in April. Their site suggests buying a new computer with Windows 8. Yikes.

He is correct. As of 8 April 2014, Microsoft will no longer provide new security updates, non-security hotfixes, technical assistance or online technical content updates. Furthermore, Microsoft will stop providing Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE) for download on Windows XP on 8 April. Office 2003 will also become "unsupported".

OK, so that is what will be missing. What will not be missing?

First, your copy of XP will continue to work on 9 April, just as it did on 7 April. Microsoft has no way to deactivate your computer or otherwise interfere with the copy of XP on board. They just will not provide any more security or regular updates.

Second, if you have MSE already installed, it will continue to work to protect your machine from malware. Further, MSE will continue to update its anti-malware signature files "for a limited time", which means that MSE will be fully functional for some "limited time", which might mean 3 months, 6 months, a year, or any other unspecified span of time. The words "limited time" above are Microsoft's, and haven't been further defined insofar as I am aware.

Third, there are plenty of very fine free antivirus programs out there that can be installed in place of MSE, so MSE is no great loss anyway. Here is a list that is in order of popularity by one rating organization: 1. Avast. 2. Panda Cloud Antivirus Free. 3. Zone Alarm Free Antivirus + Firewall. 4. Avira Free Antivirus. 5. Bitdefender Antivirus Free Edition. 6. AVG Free Antivirus. 7. 360 Internet Security 2013. So, uninstall MSE, install one of the others above (my tip: try Avast or 360; 360 is already used by millions in the Orient and has impressed several guru's). Once you have done that, you have solved that problem well beyond any "limited time" set by Microsoft. Any of the above seven are probably somewhat better than MSE, anyway! (Just remember, only install ONE antivirus program; they do not play well together and will give you grief if more than one is present.) You can uninstall MSE and install one of the others anytime. How about tomorrow?

So, don't panic. XP will continue to work, though it will be less and less safe to use with time. XP did a pretty good job for millions of us, and we got used to it and did not want to change. Microsoft did not like that; they needed to create new revenue streams and so came up with Win7, then Win8, in much too rapid succession, but we are stuck with that. So, plan on changing operating systems sometime in 2014 or 2015. You don't have a whole lot of choice.

When you do change operating systems, what should you choose? Windows 7 if you can get it. The word is that it is really a good OS. Do not choose Windows 8. If you must go above 7, choose 8.1. That means, if you do buy a new computer down the line, do not accept it with Windows 8. Demand 8.1, and use the threat of not purchasing the computer if you don't get it. Windows 8 has been said to be like Vista ... too buggy and hard to tame. That is why Microsoft came out with 8.1.

With regard to Office, I have already written about several free programs that will supply all the functionality of the Microsoft product, and they will even open Microsoft documents and save your

creations in Microsoft format. Majorgeeks likes LibreOffice and OpenOffice.org the best.

Again, don't panic. There are lots of choices and there is nothing magic about the 8Apr14 date, other than what is outlined above.

Happy computing.

"I don't know what use anyone could find for a machine that would make copies of documents. It certainly couldn't be a feasible business by itself."

-The head of IBM, refusing to back the idea, forcing the inventor to found Xerox.