XP

The Eleventh Hour

A briefing and assessment of approaches for achieving successful eleventh hour migration in advance of Microsoft Windows XP Retirement, 8 April 2014.

centrality

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1. Executive summary

Since August of 2001, and thus for the entire working life of a significant part of today's UK workforce, Microsoft's Windows XP has been the operating system of choice for many UK businesses.

But now its end is in sight.

On 8 April 2014 Microsoft will withdraw its extended support for Windows XP, leaving companies still utilising the platform exposed to unquantifiable security risks, and with costly custom support the only option available for future protection.

And lack of security is far from the only problem for those still entrusting their operations to XP.

Despite its decade of ubiquity XP, built for a simpler, pre mobile device era, is no longer able to meet the demands of the changed business IT landscape.

- **Security - After April 2014, Microsoft will release no further security patches, leaving XP based systems at the mercy of the world's hackers. Companies continuing to run their systems on XP can expect to find themselves prime targets.**

- **Technology constraints - XP imposes severe limitations on the rest of an organisation's software infrastructure. As an example, the latest version (v4.5) of .Net framework, a fundamental building block for line of business applications is not available for XP.**

- **Compatibility - Support for XP is no longer broadly provided by either software developers or hardware manufacturers. Microsoft's own Office 2013 will not work on XP, while newer hardware will rarely offer XP drivers.**

- **User issues - Continuing reliance on XP makes it harder for employees to do their work, prevents them from taking advantage of up to date tools and technologies, and advertises to them that the organisation is failing to remain competitive, contributing to disruptive and costly retention issues.**

With Windows 7 (first released in 2009), and Windows 8.1 (the Q3 2013 update to Windows 8, released in 2012), Microsoft has obvious migration options capable of meeting the needs of the majority of organisations.

Yet at June 2013, IT statistics source Netmarketshare assesses that 37.17% of PCs globally are still running XP.

This White Paper considers:

- The context surrounding the Retirement of Windows XP;

- The reasons why many organisations have left it late to plan migration from XP;

- The benefits inherent in an upgrade to Windows 7 or 8.1;

- Which later generation Windows version offers the better option;

- What a well-planned migration from XP looks like;

- Viable strategies for successfully completing an eleventh hour migration prior to April 2014

This White Paper should be used to inform and mobilise within the business, and may be considered a call to urgent action for any organisation using XP, in which planning of a migration is as yet unstarted, or in which a practical plan for deployment of a new OS does not yet exist.

2. Windows XP Retirement in context

We are entering a five year period during which no less than 8 major Microsoft enterprise software packages will reach Retirement, the point at which Microsoft and its network of partners and vendors will cease to provide product support.

For organisations of all sizes, this will herald an era of potentially disruptive migrations and upgrades, as key components of the IT infrastructure require replacement.

While inconvenience and expenditure are never welcome, organisations that plan carefully and in good time will be able to gain business advantage, sometimes of real significance, by replacing outmoded tools with newer versions designed for today's business landscape.
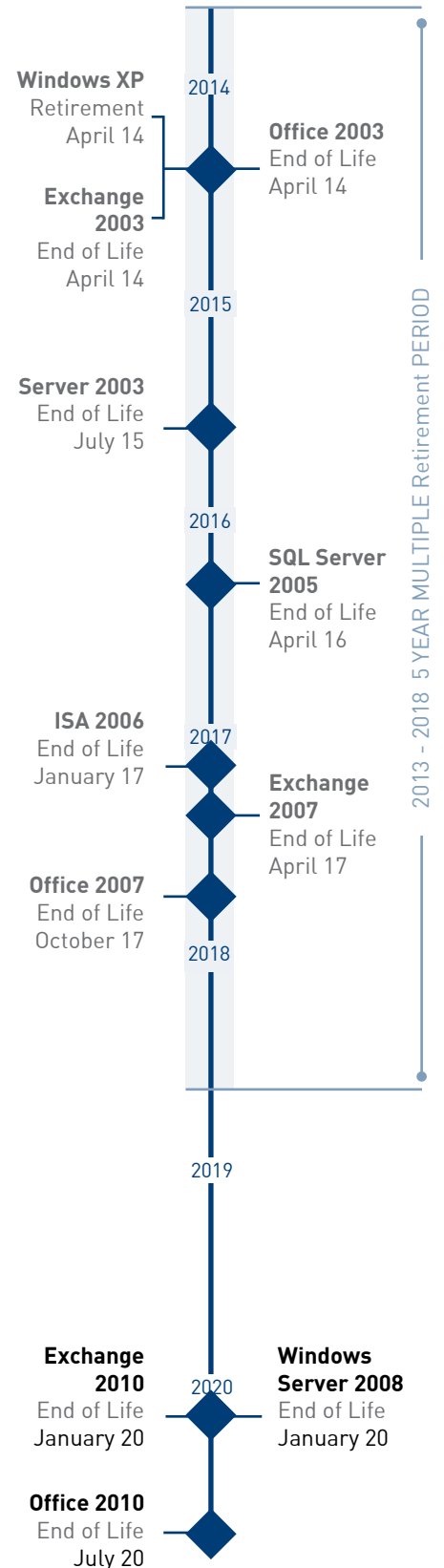
The Retirement of the Windows XP operating system, which will occur on 8 April 2014 is the first, and arguably the most significant, of these challenges.

While Microsoft flagged the date for XP Retirement as far back as 2010, and advised a planning and migration timeframe of between 18 and 32 months, it is estimated that close to 40% of UK businesses have failed to take advantage of the advance warning. These businesses are now (August 2013) within eight months of the withdrawal of extended support, at which time further security patches will cease to be released, leaving networks vulnerable to malicious and criminal attacks.

While custom support will continue to be available from Microsoft, Gartner estimate the cost of this at around £130,000 for the first year for companies with Software Assurance, and £325,000 for those without.

While some companies profess an intention to continue to use XP even after its Retirement, the security risks inherent in this suggest that it will turn out to be a position untenable for very long, and that hurried late migration will then need to be undertaken.

For the majority of companies that have not yet begun migration, or have undertaken some auditing and planning but have as yet put no solution in place for actually carrying out the deployment, the good news is that although this is the eleventh hour, it need not be too late providing prompt and appropriate action is taken without further delay.

Windows XP
Retirement
April 14

2014

Office 2003
End of Life
April 14

Exchange 2003
End of Life
April 14

2015

Server 2003
End of Life
July 15

2016

SQL Server 2005
End of Life
April 16

ISA 2006
End of Life
January 17

2017

Exchange 2007
End of Life
April 17

Office 2007
End of Life
October 17

2018

2013 - 2018 5 YEAR MULTIPLE Retirement PERIOD

2019

Exchange 2010
End of Life
January 20

2020

Windows Server 2008
End of Life
January 20

Office 2010
End of Life
July 20

3. Why have people left it so late?

Barriers preventing commencement of migration planning.

The run up to Windows XP Retirement has coincided with a period that has proved economically challenging for organisations of all sizes. It is understandable that, in such a climate, many companies have been less proactive in their plans to migrate from XP than might otherwise have been the case.

Based on anecdotal evidence, there appears that five core reasons have led companies to either take the risk-laden decision to reject a migration (leaving themselves vulnerable to security threats or facing expensive bills for custom support), or to delay planning and implementing a migration with the result that they are now in the period in which successful migration before withdrawal of support may prove challenging.

For an organisation which has not yet put plans in place, recognising the barriers likely to have brought about this situation may prove of value in securing agreement to advance without further dangerous delay.

3.1 Cost

As with any major IT infrastructure project, the cost of migration from Windows XP is likely to prove significant. This may well result in companies needing to restrategise and prioritise both IT expenditure and other capital projects within the business.

While cost is likely to be a serious consideration for any organisation, it should be born in mind that an upgrade to a current version of Windows might be expected to bring about enhancements in efficiencies and flexible working, as well as removing the contingency budgets that will be required by those remaining on XP to address security issues using custom support.

The familiar cry that new hardware will be needed in order to migrate from XP is plainly untrue.

The familiar cry that new hardware will be needed in order to migrate from XP is also plainly untrue.

Few people, even within IT departments, appear to realise or remember

that almost all PCs bought in the last 7 to 8 years will run Windows 7 quite happily. Only slightly fewer will run Windows 8.1. Additionally, machines purchased in the last four years are likely to already be licensed for Windows 7, as a minimum. Taken together, these can lead to a substantial saving.

One organisation recently advised by UK managed services specialist, Centrality Ltd, found that its plan to purchase 750 new PCs could in fact be reduced to a purchase of between 30 and 50 machines, resulting in a significant reduction in required capital expenditure.

3.2 Lack of appreciation of importance of migrating

While it seems likely that most CIOs, CTOs and network managers will have long recognised the need to upgrade from Windows XP before the risk posed by withdrawal of extended support becomes live, senior executives with a non-technical background may have failed to prioritise this appropriately.

In organisations (and particularly in SME businesses in which expenditure on and maintenance of the network might be represented at board level by a non-technical director), failure to fully appreciate the risks and benefits associated with migration may be responsible for no strategy having been put in place.

3.3 Time to plan and implement migration

There are few, if any, precedents for a migration of the kind involved in shifting from Windows XP to Windows 7 (or 8.1).

It seems likely, therefore, that in some organisations planning for this upgrade has been repeatedly deferred 'until nearer the time', in the belief that a late go ahead might still allow adequate planning and deployment within the last few months.

Microsoft's own guidance has been cautious throughout, advising that a period of between 18 and 32 months should be allowed by all organisations in order to properly plan and execute the migration, along with all applications.

At time of writing (August 2013), only 8 months remain until support is withdrawn, and so any company that has delayed thus far should consider that the time for action has now arrived.

3.4 'Head in the sand' thinking

It is estimated that some 20% of all IT professionals intend to allow Windows XP to remain in use, despite the significant risks to which this will expose their organisations.

While a percentage of them may be taking the view that XP, even

Percentage of all IT professionals estimated at August 2013 as intending to allow Windows XP to remain in use in their organisations.

20%

without support, will continue to meet their needs, it seems likely that a majority are simply overcome by the scale of the migration task, and are burying their heads in the sand until some future circumstance, presumably a security breach, forces their hand.

Clearly, 'head in the sand' thinking is no way to strategise the upkeep of a system central to the operation of a commercial organisation.

Failure to upgrade may have significant compliance implications for a business, in addition to the costs and liabilities at stake when a security breach occurs with no patches available.

Additionally, by persisting with XP, these organisations delay their ability to take advantage of the possibilities which current Windows systems bring for mobile working, improved hardware and powerful, contemporary business applications.

3.5 Resistance in the business

The existence of active resistance within the business may also have created a considerable barrier to initiating planning to migrate from XP.

Resistance of this kind is generally based on i) financial conservatism; ii) lack of appreciation of the risks associated with failing to migrate and benefits to be gained from migrating; or iii) misguided sponsorship of other projects competing for funding, by interested internal stake-holders.

The risks to which failure to migrate exposes the business, along with the opportunities which continuing to use XP deny to it, form a compelling case for overcoming such resistance, and even at this late stage, careful preparation and presentation of the case in order to win over opponents will serve the overall interests of the business well.

4. Looking on the bright side

Why migration is not only a necessity, but a business advantage, too.

Even within those organisations inclined to leave be things they perceive as not broken, it would be irresponsible to ignore the short-comings of XP in an attempt to justify soldiering on past the Retirement withdrawal of support.

Equally, it would be negligent to proceed unaware, or to allow the business to proceed unaware, of the substantial advantages that migration to a current version of Windows will bring.

4.1 Unlocking the power of flexible working

The Retirement of Windows XP is of course a disruption and inconvenience for an organisation to have to deal with, but this is far from being an upgrade without advantages.

In spite of the fine service that XP has provided to business during its lifespan, the landscape of enterprise IT looks very different now to the way it appeared in 2001 and XP is simply no longer able to deliver against commercial needs.

XP is unable to provide any kind of basis for leveraging value from mobile technologies, or from the accompanying business trend towards enabling employees to use their own devices in association with the network infrastructure (BYOD -'bring your own devices', as it is known.)

For any company wishing to enable working in this more flexible way, Windows 7 or 8.1 is a necessity, meaning that the migration brings with it clear benefits in terms of efficiencies and flexibility in the workforce.

4.2 Securing substantial improvements to security

While Windows XP actually came to market in 2001, its code is based on ideas and components that date back to the advent of Windows NT 4.0 in 1996.

This, in turn, used code from the 1993 iteration of Windows NT which was based on even earlier work between Microsoft and IBM.

In other words, Windows XP creaks, and no matter how many security patches were layered onto it, its vulnerability has long been considered too great an exposure by many commercial organisations.

With no further patches forthcoming after withdrawal of support, organisations operating in a compliance environment, or seeking to conform with PCI Security Standards Council guidelines on EPOS, will be likely to find themselves in breach within days of 8 April 2014.

4.3 Opening up modern browser use

An upgrade to Windows 7 or 8.1 immediately removes the limitation on browser versions imposed by Windows XP.

While third party Chrome and Firefox browsers will work in the XP environment (but have their own adoption issues especially for older web-apps that are IE dependent), XP is incapable of running any version of Microsoft's own Internet Explorer browser beyond IE8.

The later versions of Windows, however, run IE9 and IE10, both of which provide support for HTML5, now firmly established as the everyday language of the web.

Failure to adopt HTML5 will prove a constraint on any organisation, regardless of whether it chooses to adopt cloud services, because of the fast growing shift amongst software vendors towards this technology, even for software hosted on-premise.

4.3.1 Belated updating of aged web-enabled applications

There are still organisations dependent on web-enabled applications which require IE6 in order to run.

As neither Windows 7 nor 8.1 will run these, for organisations with such applications XP Retirement points naturally to either an update or rebuild.
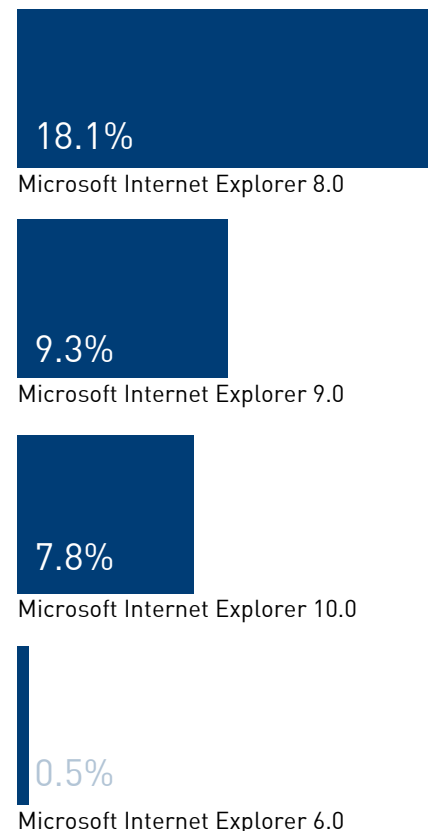
It must be noted, however, that redevelopment of web applications may not now be possible before Retirement, given its proximity, and that for companies for which this is an issue browser emulation plug-ins may provide a short term workaround until redevelopment is complete.

4.4 Enable modern software and hardware upgrades

With each week that passes, more and more third party software vendors cease support for XP, creating restrictions on the freedom of companies still running the system to upgrade or adopt new business applications and hardware.

Over 18% of all visits to UK Government websites during July 2013 were still being made via Internet Explorer version 8, the latest version capable of being run on Windows XP.

SOURCE http://data.gov.uk

18.1%
Microsoft Internet Explorer 8.0

9.3%
Microsoft Internet Explorer 9.0

7.8%
Microsoft Internet Explorer 10.0

0.5%
Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0

Migrating to a current version of Windows unlocks the potential of the enhanced features and faster running speeds of later releases and newer packages designed to take advantage of modern operating systems.

XP restricts valuable upgrades to hardware in similar fashion, with few manufacturers now developing drivers to enable their products for the declining operating system.

Upgrading again puts faster, newer and more efficient hardware at the disposal of the business.

5. Which to choose?

Deciding between migration to Windows 7 and 8.1.

Of the Microsoft operating systems released since Windows XP, Windows 7 is now clearly established as the mainstream successor to XP.

While the Q3 2013 release of its Windows 8.1 update goes a good way towards helping Microsoft regain the confidence of potential enterprise users, the original version of Windows 8 fell short in this regard.

A survey of IT professionals published early in 2013 (and so before the release of the Windows 8.1 update) by Dell indicated that of 273 professionals upgrading their organisations from Windows XP, an overwhelming 69% were moving to Windows 7, with just 2% choosing the original Windows 8.

According to Forrester, approximately 50% of all enterprise installations now use Windows 7.

Windows 7. The low-risk option

Windows 7, released in 2009, is the tried and tested upgrade from Windows XP. While its architecture is radically different to that of XP, its environment remains recognisable to users.

As Microsoft have committed to supporting Windows 7 through until 2020, and as application and hardware compatibility issues mean that the leap from Windows XP to Windows 7 is a far bigger step than any future transition from Windows 7 to Windows 8.1 will be, an organisation moving now to Windows 7 can reasonably feel that it has set itself up well for the next 10 years at least.
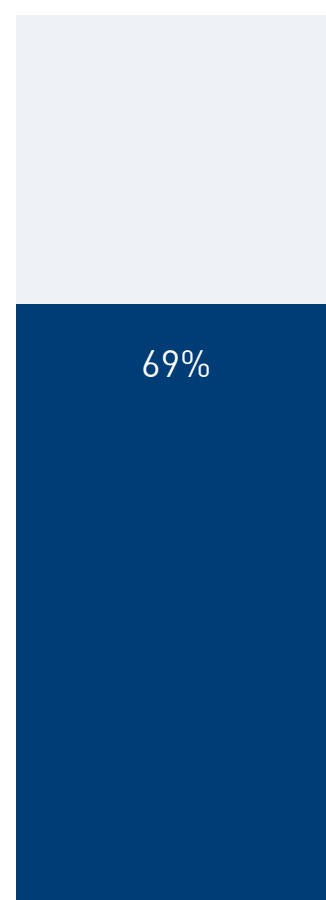
Windows 8.1.

With the release of its Windows 8.1 update (Q3 2013), Microsoft has gone a good way to winning over doubtful potential enterprise users, broadening the accessibility of the OS while providing enhancements in performance and ease of operation that make the version a far more viable option for enterprise than the original release.

The manufacturer has also announced that support for the original version of Windows 8 will end 2 years after the Q3 2013 release of Windows 8.1, meaning that any organisation deploying Windows 8 today will have to undertake an upgrade process to 8.1 in the coming months.

Percentage of 273 IT professionals migrating Windows XP surveyed, who were shifting to Windows 7.

SOURCE Dell

69%

Take the big step first

Even those organisations tempted by the Windows 8.1 update would still do well to heed the (pre Windows 8.1 release) advice of Richard Kleynhans at Gartner. "Get Windows 7 done, and then you can start to experiment and dabble with Windows 8. But don't let Windows 8 derail your Windows 7 upgrade project."

In this context, it should be assumed that Kleynhans's advice remains just as prudent for those considering Windows 8.1 as it was in its original form for those considering Windows 8.

6. Consideration of VDI

Might Virtual Desktop Infrastructure offer a sensible option for migration?

The need to migrate from XP will make this a point at which organisations may be lobbied by internal interests in favour of shifting to a Virtual Desktop Infrastructure.

Indeed, there appears to be a misconception rife in many organisations that VDI is actually the easiest way to migrate an operating system. A misconception, however, is precisely what this is.

The VDI model involves hosting the virtual desktop of each user in the data centre, with access then possible from any connected device.

It's a scenario deserving consideration, though it is frequently driven by a fallacious belief that VDI will result in lower costs.

Except in very specific usage situations, this is unlikely to prove to be the case.

The broad principle underlying VDI is that a large number of virtual desktops share restricted processing capacity, with each desktop thus limited in the power available to it.

Whereas even a low-cost, new physical desktop will be likely to offer its user a substantial improvement in power, speed and peripheral support capability over the machine it replaces, a virtual desktop may well provide individual employees with little or no upgrade to their user experience, if not actually constitute a retrograde step, because of its sharing of resources.

For users working from laptops or devices, and so perhaps sometimes subject to poor or limited connectivity, VDI is simply not a reliable option at all.

So while the model may prove of interest (and perhaps facilitate small savings) in situations where very many users perform a small number of tasks only and their user experience is not of concern, organisations keen to provide employees with a capable and up to date resource will be unlikely to find this their best course of action.

It should also be noted that, in the limited time now available before XP Retirement, a move to VDI will prove significantly more complex than straight refresh of the PCs.

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7. Getting real

What does a properly executed migration look like?

Set aside for a moment the proximity of the withdrawal of XP extended support, and the time pressures this imposes.

With unlimited time available, what should a properly planned and executed migration from Windows XP to Windows 7 or 8.1 comprise of?

7.1 Auditing

A comprehensive and well thought out migration from Windows XP begins with an audit of software, hardware, people and work methodologies, so that the new environment can be assessed in terms of the configuration usability, application and hardware requirements.

While it's a frequently expressed concern that a high percentage of new hardware will be required in order to run Windows 7 or 8.1, this is unlikely to prove founded. Provided devices have been purchased in the last 7 years or so, they should not need replacing in order to switch to either OS. However, the audit process will highlight any simple and low cost upgrades that may be required to get the most out of such existing hardware.

While it's a frequently expressed concern that a high percentage of new hardware will be required in order to run Windows 7 or 8.1, this is unlikely to prove founded.

The audit process also provides an opportunity to refresh understanding of how users work, what obstacles currently frustrate them and which 'easy wins' might be built into a final environment to deliver great benefits to your community, and so provide favourable internal PR simply for utilising clever design.

7.2 Rationalising of applications

It is a huge benefit to any organisation to standardise a single build, or 'common desktop', across all its devices.

Wherever possible, the organisation should simplify its desktop environment in order to cut the number of applications it uses. Tools are available to monitor application use and, if data is captured over a valid time period, applications used rarely and by few users can be identified.

While a completely virtual desktop environment may bring certain advantages to some organisations, those migrating only now from Windows XP are likely to view this as undesirable when a cheaper and quicker XP migration can be achieved, leading to a better working environment for users.

7.3. Application testing

Thorough testing of the compatibility of all applications being carried forward to the rationalised desktop is required, in order to ensure their ability to run with Windows 7 or 8.1. The testing process will highlight rare applications that might require manual intervention.

While fear of costly software incompatibilities seems to run high within IT departments, managed services specialist Centrality observes that, in having rolled out thousands of Windows 7 devices across multiple industries, only about 2% of enterprise software has been found to be not readily compatible with Windows 7.

7.4 Deployment

Even with auditing, rationalisation and testing completed, deployment of Windows 7 or 8.1 across an estate of PCs is a substantial task requiring meticulous project management and benefiting greatly from practical experience.

While many consultants excel in the auditing, rationalisation and testing phases of such a migration, it is more difficult to find assistance with the 'dirty end': the work of deploying the new OS efficiently and speedily to either a new estate of boxed PCs or, as is very frequently the requirement, to an estate of existing PCs spread across multiple sites and with differing availability of users.

It is advisable to interrogate consultants and in-house IT teams as to the precise approach to be adopted for deployment as inadequate provision, or poor tools, may result in escalated costs and widespread disruption to the business.

With the proximity of the withdrawal of extended support for Windows XP in April 2014, this may also result in failing to complete migration before the deadline, exposing the business to security risks and non-compliance issues.

On the basis of several thousand Windows 7 deployments across multiple industries, just 2% of software has been found to be not readily compatible with Windows 7.

SOURCE centrality

2%

98%
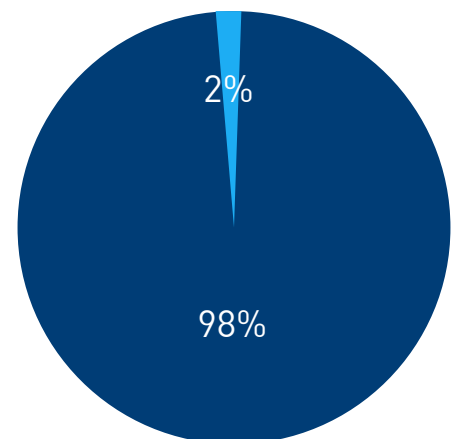
8. Pulling it out of the fire

Strategies for a successful eleventh hour migration from Windows XP to Windows 7 or 8.1.

With Microsoft having advised, early on, a planning and implementation period of 18 to 32 months for XP migration dependent on the size of the estate, we are now (August 2013) deep into the 'red alert' period for companies which are yet even to commence planning.

For those companies whose planning is underway, but which have not yet adopted a concrete strategy for implementation, the alerts are also now escalating from amber to red.

It should not be ignored that Microsoft has taken the exceptional step of rebadging the April 2014 conclusion to XP's reign from its normal 'End of Life' terminology, to the rather more pointed 'Retirement'.

So what are the options available to you if your organisation is still to commence its planning?

8.1 Continue to do nothing

This, of course, is not a strategy for pulling off a migration from XP at this late hour, but is considered here for being an 'option' which may still find advocates in some organisations.

There may be pressure or inertia within the business, claiming that this is simply the latest 'Y2K-style' panic from the IT industry, that the withdrawal of extended support will not have any material effect on the business, and that any problems that arise thereafter will be most efficiently and economically tackled ad hoc.

This may be complemented by fear-mongering, such as the spreading of baseless myths that the organisation's applications will all fail to work on later versions of Windows. In reality, only around 2% of all commercial applications require anything more than minor tuning in order to function fully in Windows 7 and 8.1.

To do nothing would be the least prudent course of action imaginable, however. 'Y2K' was an uncertainty about how code and systems which

> There may be the spreading of baseless myths that the organisation's applications will all fail to work on current versions of Windows.

had not allowed for the turn of a century might respond. As it turned out, for the most part the worst did not happen.

Windows XP will, however, as surely as night follows day, have extended support withdrawn on 8 April 2014. Thereafter, an architecture that is notoriously vulnerable to hacking anyway, will not be defended by the security teams at Microsoft. Unless an organisation puts in place its own arrangements for custom support for XP, at an expense likely to run to hundreds of thousands of pounds per annum, it will be exposed to the kind of malign or criminal hacking that can cause costly or even catastrophic damage to its operations and reputation.

If you run EPOS/electronic transaction systems, failure to migrate would also leave you in breach of PCI compliance, which requires you to, "ensure that all system components and software are protected from known vulnerabilities by having the latest vendor-supplied security patches installed. Install critical security patches within one month of release".

In the end, a 'Do Nothing' strategy is tantamount to opting to 'Migrate by Osmosis'. As broken PCs are replaced, or new ones are brought in to the organisation, they will not be retro fitted with Windows XP.

Instead, they will be likely to receive the most current available OS, resulting in a fragmented PC environment which, in itself, creates a host of ongoing challenges.

Similarly, as more and more vendors drop their XP support, the organisation will feel the walls closing in and its options narrowing, until belated and costly migration (after months or even years of increasingly inadequate 'making do') becomes its only course of action.

8.2 Migrate to a VDI solution

Whether or not to shift to a VDI is a decision that needs to be taken, rather than in itself an approach as to how to achieve the result, and even organisations which assess the pros and cons of VDI and decide in its favour will then need to settle on one or other of the approaches dealt with in 8.3-8.6 in order to carry out their migration in advance of 8 April 2014.

It should be noted that, contrary to widely held belief, VDI does not resolve application compatibility issues, and may in fact compound these due to its nature.

Where cost saving is the principal argument in favour of VDI, it should also be noted that such savings may either fail to materialise, or else be extremely modest in nature. Where user needs require capabilities

of any real power, the cost of a VDI solution may actually work out to be greater than the cost of physical desktop migration.

8.3 Migrate normally, using in-house staff and resources

There is an option to authorise in-house IT staff and resources to move ahead without any further delay in planning (or completing planning) and carrying out a normal (ie. non VDI) migration.

However, it is unlikely that anyone working within the team will have prior experience of planning or managing a migration of this type, and this may prove costly.

Depending on the size of the PC estate, complexity of your systems and scale of resource available, this may also involve disruptive redeployment of resource from other projects also important to the business.

In order to stand a chance of succeeding in their task within the limited timeframe now remaining, an in-house team will need to combine its audit and planning schedule with an appraisal of the market to identify technologies that may be available to assist with the migration itself once the planning is complete.

8.4 Migrate normally, entrusting the project to external consultants

External consultants should bring with them experience in auditing, rationalising the application portfolio and assessing incompatibilities during a large scale migration.

Given the urgency now brought about by the proximity of the Retirement deadline, this should prove valuable, enabling them to move more swiftly through the planning phase than an in-house team might do.

Where they are most likely to come up short is in designing and managing the actual deployment across the estate: the part of the task such firms tend to consider less interesting and somewhat prosaic.

If adopting this route, it is advisable to insist at the outset on a clear proposal for the tools that will be used to deploy the new operating system, and the performance basis on which these have been selected.

An ill-considered choice of tools may lead an organisation to embark on a potentially costly and disruptive project without any clearly defined endpoint.

8.5 Migrate normally, using consultants, but retaining responsibility for deployment tools

Given the little time available before the April 2014 withdrawal of extended support for XP, organisations still determined to avoid

exposure by completing a properly planned and deployed migration should consider taking responsibility themselves for the selection of the delivery toolkit at the outset.

This decision in itself can have a major bearing on how the project is planned and the time required to complete it successfully.

An efficient deployment tool will release now much needed extra time into the critical path, enabling greater attention to be paid to planning for rationalisation of hardware and software, and so bringing additional longer term benefits to the business.

Tools which separate hardware and build configuration have proved themselves particularly effective in such deployments. As an additional benefit, such tools will usually provide residual value to the business, enabling fast and simple future deployment of operating system rebuilds or upgrades to all or part of the estate, as well as rapid remote rebuilding of faulty machines.

This 'tools first' approach may be relevant to managements utilising an experienced in-house project team with the resource available to research and feedback on appropriate tools.

It may prove particularly valuable, however, to incorporate this requirement into the contract when retaining consultants, or by retaining a consultant or managed services specialist experienced in achieving large scale operating system deployments of this kind using a proven and preferred toolkit.

8.6 Migrate normally, outsourcing the entire project, start to finish

While consultants tend to focus on the planning stages of a migration of this kind, there are a good number of specialist managed services firms in the market which possess both the planning and deployment skillsets to come into your organisation and deal with the whole thing for you.

Such companies will have their own preferred and proven deployment tools, and successful completion of the task by the deadline will be embedded into the contract terms.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The Retirement of Windows XP is an inevitable end to 12 years of service of a workhorse operating system that has served organisations of all sizes extremely well.

9.2 The withdrawal of extended support was clearly advised by the developer of XP, Microsoft, in ample time to enable business to make appropriate plans for migration.

9.3 Microsoft's Windows 7, and in some cases Windows 8.1, offer an obvious migration path, bringing with it significant operating benefits. The upgrade may, however, require expenditure to replace old hardware unable to support the Windows 7 or 8.1 architecture, and may also point to redevelopment of legacy, bespoke browser-enabled business applications designed for Internet Explorer 6.

9.4 The time still available until withdrawal of extended support is significantly less than the 18-32 months recommended by Microsoft for a well-planned and successful migration. However, in many organisations, a successful migration may still be achievable if further delay is avoided.

9.5 Failure to migrate from Windows XP will leave any organisation continuing to use it after 8 April 2014 exposed to breaches in security for which no patches will be issued. Costly custom support will be the only way to remedy these breaches. Organisations with compliance obligations may find these contravened by their lack of security patches. This is particularly relevant to e-commerce and retail users.

9.6 Organisations remaining on Windows XP may experience employees undertaking 'BYOD by stealth', bringing their own newer and better equipped devices into the workplace to counteract the failure of the IT department to deliver the capabilities they require. This may be expected to create myriad problems for the IT department.

9.7 Moving to a Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) solution will, in most cases, provide users with reduced capabilities and is unlikely to produce any significant cost saving. In many cases, the cost of a VDI

CONCLUSION

solution actually works out more expensive than a physical desktop solution.

9.8 A number of courses of action are open to organisations wishing to initiate or accelerate planning in order to ensure migration prior to 8 April 2014. While these include pursuing migration via internal resources alone, in many organisations this is likely to prove both disruptive and ill advised. External consultants (or broader, specialist outsourced resources) with experience of largescale migration offer a lower risk alternative.

9.9 Considering the short timeframe available in which to plan and execute a migration, the tools selected to carry out the actual deployment may have a significant bearing on the successful completion of the project. Consultants may tend to place greater weight on the planning and strategising phase of the task than on its implementation, and so the organisation should give due consideration to taking responsibility for understanding and agreeing the choice of deployment tools at the outset. Consultants using familiar and proven deployment tools and planning the migration from the outset with these in mind may still represent a good route for achieving successful migration before withdrawal of extended support.

9.10 At this late stage of planning a migration from XP, serious consideration might be given to outsourcing the entire project to a specialist managed services company with the breadth, experience, skillsets and tools required to ensure thorough planning and efficient deployment before April 2014.

9.11 It should be noted that the later an organisation leaves it address its XP migration issue, the higher the cost is likely to prove, with capable consultants and specialist managed services firms becoming heavily booked, with fees escalating accordingly.

About Centrality

Centrality is a specialist IT Services consultancy based in Bedfordshire, UK. Since 1996, Centrality has been developing effective and practical migration solutions, managing their implementation, and advising companies of all sizes on the design, construction and management of their IT estates.

With 17 years of successful business relationships to its credit, Centrality is regarded as an expert in practical implementation, particularly in time-sensitive situations.

http://www.centrality.com/

About OS Installer

OS Installer is a fully featured and roadtested enterprise software suite, developed by Centrality and proven in largescale commercial use.

OS Installer radically simplifies deployment of any version of Windows on to any hardware, anywhere, separating out build configuration from hardware, and using templates or "builds" to logically describe how PCs and servers should be configured.

It gives total consistency of builds across infinite hardware types, with the flexibility that all companies need but even the most advanced, image-only products cannot deliver.

Builds are fully automated with the facility for a virtually unlimited number to run in parallel.

The dexterity of OS Installer offers the prospect of fully successful migration from Windows XP, even for companies coming late to migration planning, as well as providing an effective way to manage and maintain systems and application portfolios.

http://www.osinstaller.com/

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