

Greenspring Computer User FAQs

The computer club sent a query to the membership as to what programs they would like to see in the future. When the responses were received it was apparent that some of the issues should be addressed immediately and should not wait until a formal meeting of the Club could be convened. This document in the form of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) often found in many on line subjects was prepared. We will still have the option of convening meetings on the subjects which can go into more detail and answer questions the FAQ may engender. The FAQ has provided guidance to me, and I recommend it to you as you ponder possible upgrades to your computer. Many thanks go to Bob Sinclair working with members of the Club's Board of Directors and others for taking initiative to prepare this timely document.

Hal Langford, President - Greenspring Computer Club

Questions Facing GSV computer users in near future

Question: What happens when Microsoft stops supporting Windows XP After April 8, 2014?

Background: There are two schools of thought about the demise of Windows XP. One says that the “Hackers” and cybercriminals are just stockpiling the vulnerabilities they find, and make an onslaught starting on April 9th.

The other side of this discussion says that Windows XP is getting old and tired and will not support new products and applications that are currently being produced. In April it will have been 7 years since XP was a current product, it was officially replaced in November 2006. That being said, there will still be people and businesses using XP for a lot of reasons.

The answer to this question depends on how you expect to use your computer. XP will continue to work but Microsoft will not make improvements, or correct discrepancies discovered by users. This will result in less integral malware protection. The malware protection software provided either by commercial or system user groups will continue to function at least for the immediate future. McAfee, for example, plans to continue supporting XP for a limited time as long as it is technically feasible, and there is no external dependency. If, for example, a McAfee product requires Microsoft to provide a fix and Microsoft does not provide the fix McAfee will not support the product any longer. McAfee strongly advises its customers to upgrade to later versions of Windows to ensure the best level of security coverage, (McAfee Technical Article KB78434). Other software security providers will probably be forced to do the same.

If your main use of the computer is for email, limited surfing on the web, or word processing you will probably not need to make any changes in the near future. Software updates for antivirus programs and Adobe products may be the first to require newer

operating systems, but whatever is installed at that time should continue to function normally. To avoid the potential problems from hackers you must be sure to use a security system and keep it up to date. Free malware programs such as Avira, AVG, and Avast are available for downloading, and commercial security suites such as Norton, McAfee, and a whole host of others are available in software aisles of computer support centers and over the internet. If, however, you are a heavy user of the internet and are worried about viruses and other malware contamination, or are not satisfied without access to new or upgraded applications, you may want to consider upgrading to Windows 7 or 8 on a new computer. Upgrading an older computer to a supported operating system is not considered to be a viable solution because of hardware improvements used by the new systems. In the long term, vendors of application software will not be producing new or improved software that runs on XP. Again, use of freeware such as Open Office, Libre Office, Google Docs, etc. may fill in gaps that may occur

Question: Windows 8 Pros and Cons. Is it worth buying and why?

Windows 8 is designed primarily for touch screen tablets and laptops which have touch screens. Microsoft Has incorporated many improvements in using the software, but it has a reasonably steep learning curve. They claim that viruses and malware will be less of a problem because they have included an improved security system that blocks any non-authenticated software from running or performing any operations during the boot-up process. The boot-up is much faster because it caches part of the system and keeps it in sort of a sleep mode. The start screen is controversial and quite different. Certain apps can display information without actually having to open them. These are called live tiles and they display such things as stock market movement, up-to- date weather forecasts, recently arrived email and suggested topics from the Bing search engine. There are a plethora of apps for sale in the Windows Store where you can select from thousands of titles much as those provided by Apple. Underneath this new start menu is a traditional Windows 7 environment called the “desktop” which incorporates the new features of the 8 version and works best with a mouse or touchpad. Microsoft has introduced a whole new range of keyboard shortcuts and the function keys are back in use. It is reported that some people like the convenience of having two types of computers simultaneously, but others find combining the dual usage confusing.

The best way to decide whether to convert to Windows 8 is by determining how you want to use your computer. For most users, staying with your present computer until you are ready or need to buy a new computer will make the most sense. Then the latest version of the operating system will come pre-installed. If, however, you find yourself limited by your present operating system, you must decide whether to upgrade to a Windows 7 or Windows 8 computer. A Windows 7 computer more closely resembles XP and will allow an easier transition. Windows 7 computers are getting harder to find. Windows 8 does have a lot of new capabilities and if you are willing to put up with the changes which will follow the initial version, you won't have to make a “keep or change” operating system

decision for a long time. Using the underlying desktop mode is not too different from windows 7 once you become accustomed to the different appearance. Unfortunately upgrading an older XP computer to Windows 7 or 8 is not recommended. Such an installation would require removal of all data and programs from the hard drive and then reinstallation of the old XP disk followed by installation of the new OS and all programs (if the disks are still available) and reinstallation of the data. And you would still be relying on a 32 bit version of the more powerful OS which is designed to use 64 bits. Some older programs probably won't work and you will have to determine if you can get an updated program from the manufacturer, find a freeware substitute, or procure a new version of the application.

Question: How do I translate programs in MS Works, Spreadsheets and Databases into Windows 7 or 8 on a new computer?

If you are moving Microsoft data files to a new computer you must have the corresponding program installed on the new computer, either the old version if it will still run (you need the activation key), or a new version. The new computer may come with "Starter" versions of Word and Excel that can accept data from prior programs. Any new version of the Microsoft product should be able to read the older versions as well.

Greenspring Computer Club Members

After the presentation on the demise of Windows XP by John Redmond, several residents have asked if the Computer Club can provide any additional guidance. The points we enumerated in the FAQ which can be found on the Computer Club web site, remain valid.

If you are a casual user of the internet, you can probably use Windows XP for some time if you adhere to precautionary measures. Although commercial anti-malware programs will continue in use they will not guarantee provision for XP. For example, if a McAfee product requires Microsoft to provide a fix and Microsoft does not provide the fix, McAfee will not support the product any longer. It would be prudent to switch to free malware programs such as Avira, AVG, and Avast which are available for downloading. These programs will probably maintain their currency for a longer period of time. If you are more than a casual user you may want to consider getting a new computer.

You will be able to use your old Microsoft application programs such as Word and Excel without any problem. As new applications are provided around the community, you may find some will not have incorporated the capability of using older versions of the files, but they are usually upwardly compatible. These problems can be skirted by using free open source products such as Open Office.

We do not recommend upgrading an older computer to a supported operating system because the new systems as a rule require more memory and work best with faster processors. Even if the computer will support the new OS, performance will be less than satisfactory. A quick check of the feasibility of upgrade is to use Windows 8 Upgrade Advisor to check hardware capacity. Just type "Windows 8 Upgrade Advisor" into a Google search box, press Enter, and select the "Upgrade Assistant: FAQ - Microsoft Windows Help windows.microsoft.com/.../windows-8/upgrade-assist." line in the search results. That will bring you to the site where you can download the program. If the computer will run Windows 8 it will run Windows 7. Refer to the FAQ for a more extensive answer to this problem.

One point that Mr. Redmond made over and over was to back up your computer. Hard disks do fail and if you do not have the data backed up it may be lost forever. An external hard drive or a flash drive are convenient and not terribly expensive. We highly recommend a periodic back up of your data. Most external hard drives come with a program that reminds you, or just automatically back up anything new when the computer is turned on.