



# COOPER COMPUTER CONSULTING

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## “END OF WINDOWS XP”

**Microsoft is ending support of Windows XP on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014.**

### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

Microsoft will no longer be providing Security Updates and patches for the Windows XP Operating System as they have been doing for the past 12 years.

Whenever vulnerabilities are discovered in an Operating System, weaknesses that could allow Cyber Criminals access to a computer, Microsoft issues updates and patches to close these vulnerabilities. This is why it is always important to install Windows Updates. After April 8<sup>th</sup>, however, this protection will no longer be provided and any XP computer accessing the Internet could be compromised. As Cyber Criminals and Vandals are aware of this weakness they will, undoubtedly, be launching attacks against these unprotected computers.

If you are using a computer with Windows XP, *and never intend to connect it to the Internet*, then you may be safe to continue using it as a Word Processing machine or to play Solitaire. As soon as you plug in an Ethernet cable or connect to a wireless signal, however, you may be compromising not only your own computer but also every other computer on the Internet!

Many people believe that, if they have no sensitive information in their computer, they don't have to be concerned about Cyber Criminals gaining access to their computer. Once a computer is vulnerable to such criminals, however, the affected computer can be taken over remotely and become a “Zombie” in a “Botnet”, a group of computers remotely controlled by a criminal. Thousands of these computers can then be harnessed to launch Denial Of Service attacks on businesses or Government Web Sites, effectively shutting them down. A Zombie computer can also be used to send infections to other computers on the Internet causing them to also become part of a massive Botnet.

Software companies will eventually end support of XP, too, but for now, Security companies like Kaspersky are continuing to offer virus protection. **It is vital that all computer users install a good Internet Security Program on their machines. Without Microsoft patches, however, there may still be a risk with using XP after April 8<sup>th</sup>.** Windows XP will, eventually, become no more relevant than Windows 98, Windows 95, “Etch-A-Sketch” or the abacus so **there is no point in spending much money on an old XP computer.** If you have an XP computer you might consider the following options....

### **WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS?**

#### **OPTION 1:**

If your computer is a later model machine, purchased around 2006 and is still running well, you could consider upgrading the Operating System to Windows 7 or possibly even Windows 8.1, Microsoft's latest Operating System. However, it's doubtful that older XP computers would have the ability to run Windows 8 very well. Windows 7, at this time, can still be ordered from [www.amazon.ca](http://www.amazon.ca) for just over \$100 and is a much better System than were either (*arguably*) Windows XP or (*certainly*) it's disappointing successor, Windows Vista. In order to run Windows 7 your computer must have:

- At least a 1 Ghz or faster Processor
- 1 GB of RAM for the 32 Bit version or 2 GB of RAM for the 64 Bit version of Windows 7. \*\*\*
- 16 GB of free Hard Drive space for the Operating System
- Direct X 9 Graphics

\*\*\* RAM (Random Access Memory) determines, basically, how many programs can be running at a time without slowing down the computer. A 32 Bit system will only recognize about 3.5 GB of RAM whereas a 64 Bit system can utilize much more, depending on the Processor. An older XP computer with a 32 Bit processor can not be upgraded to a 64 Bit version of Windows 7 and, therefore, is limited to the 32 Bit version of Windows 7 and a maximum of 3.5 GB of Memory.

Of course, unless you have the ability to save all your personal files from your XP System, install the new Operating System, update all your Device Drivers and reinstall your personal files you will have to pay someone to do this for you. The total cost of upgrading your old computer could be well in excess of \$300. (Before choosing this option you might consider that a brand new Windows 8.1 computer with 6 GB of RAM, a very fast modern 4 core processor and a massive 1TB hard drive can be purchased, at time of this writing, for as little as \$370.00 !!)

#### **OPTION 2:**

If money is tight but you want a computer that will safely access the Internet you might want to look for a used computer running Windows 7 or even Windows Vista if you can't find Windows 7. The seller should restore the computer to it's Factory Restore condition before offering it for sale but, if not, you should do that and then install a good security program and download and install all Windows Updates.

#### **OPTION 3:**

Purchase a new computer running the latest Microsoft Operating System. If the computer is running Windows 8 be sure to upgrade it to Windows 8.1, which has many improvements and can be downloaded free from the Windows App Store. As mentioned above, at the time of this writing, a brand new Windows 8.1 computer with 6 GB of RAM, a very fast modern 4 core processor and a massive 1TB hard drive can be purchased for as little as \$370.00 plus taxes and extended warranty. A great addition to Windows 8.1 is a \$5 program called "Start8" from Stardock.com. It places the old familiar Start button, with all its features, back on the desktop.

#### **OPTION 4:**

If you relish the challenge of learning a completely different Operating System you might consider "kissing Microsoft goodbye" and installing a Linux Operating System, such as Mint, Ubuntu or any of the various other versions of Linux, in your old XP. The Linux Operating System is "Open Source" and is not owned by any one company such as Microsoft or Apple but continues to be developed and improved by thousands of programmers all over the world who dedicate their services to updating and improving this System. Most Linux Operating Systems are FREE and there are vast amounts of information and tutorials on the Internet about this System. Linux is a very stable System and is seldom attacked by Cyber Vandals. Your familiar Windows programs will not run in Linux but there are many free compatible programs available.

The System requirements to install Linux are:

1. At least a 700 MHz processor (about Intel Celeron or better)
2. 512 MB RAM
3. 5 GB of hard-drive space and VGA capable of 1024x768 screen resolution
4. Either a CD/DVD drive or a USB port for the installer media

#### **OPTION 5:**

If you are inclined to, indeed, "kiss Microsoft goodbye" then you might want to consider purchasing an Apple Mac computer. Macs are, initially, more expensive to purchase than Windows computers, although a "Mac Mini" can be purchased for a little as \$590.00, which is comparable in price to a very good Windows machine. The cheapest full sized desktop iMac is \$1300.00 plus taxes. Macs do, however, come loaded with most of the software you might need at no additional cost and when a new version of an Apple Operating System is released it is either FREE or in the range of a mere \$30.00 rather than the excessive charges Microsoft demands for the various "versions" of their new Operating Systems!

Many Mac users like to believe that Macs are infallible but this is certainly NOT true. They are still computers with the same types of components as Windows computers and any computer can, and will, screw up and cause grief at some time. That's just what computers do. It is also a myth that Macs are impervious to virus and Malware infections. At one time Macs held less than 8% of the market so Cyber Criminals did not bother attacking them but, now that Apple is gaining in market share, they are becoming a tempting target as well. Not *quite* as susceptible to viruses, but they are certainly as vulnerable to security flaws, identity theft, phishing and SPAM attacks as anything else that accesses the Internet and where the operator is not careful. ***Just this week, in fact, a serious security flaw that was discovered in Apple computers, iPads and iPhones was announced on the news !*** Macs can also inadvertently pass on virus infections to Windows computers.

Many of the software programs with which you are familiar in Windows will not work on a Mac and some software companies that produce a Mac version of their Windows programs have done a poor job of the Mac version and they do not always work as well as in Windows. That being said, however, programs that have been developed specifically for Mac are generally very good and, in many cases, can be superior to compatible Windows Programs.

Microsoft Office, which was originally a Windows program, has, fortunately, a version for Mac and it is excellent. If you have Windows programs that are essential to your business you can run both Apple and Windows Operating Systems together on an iMac with an excellent program, "Parallels Desktop". It creates a Virtual Hard Drive on which you can install a Windows Operating System along side Mac OSX. Of course, you would have to purchase the Windows Operating System and license before installing it on your iMac. There is a bit of a learning curve if you switch to a Mac but they are very user friendly and easy to learn. I have found that those clients of mine who switched from Windows to Mac seldom contact me with problems any more. As the saying goes, "Macs just work!"

#### **OPTION 6:**

If you do not really have the need for a "Desktop" computer, if you primarily just use your computer to check emails, Facebook and surf the Internet, then you might consider dumping your big old XP computer and monitor and buying a "Tablet". Tablets are reasonably priced, portable, include both a still and video camera and have cool applications that can do more than a Desktop PC. Tablet Solid State Hard Drives are less sensitive to damage from movement than are laptop Hard Drives thus offering safer portability.

Both Apple and Microsoft make tablets. The Apple "iPad" is a very popular Tablet but, as with everything Apple, is considerably more expensive and proprietary than others. The Microsoft, "Surface" is newer to the market and, although it includes a free version of Microsoft Office, the number of "Apps" (applications or programs) available at time of this writing is quite limited.

My personal preference in Tablets is the "Android" Operating System by Google. Most major computer companies such as Samsung, Asus, Acer, Dell and Lenovo all manufacture Android Tablets and they are available in either 10.1" or 7" models priced anywhere from \$120 - \$500. Many of them have USB ports to allow for extra storage to a Flash stick or external Hard Drive and there are a vast number of Apps available with more available every day. The Google Nexus 7 at \$250 is a very impressive little tablet and is small enough to carry anywhere. You will need a wireless router to access the Internet at home and there are wireless "Hotspots" almost anywhere you might want to take a tablet. If your primary use of a computer is just email, Facebook and Web surfing a Tablet might be your best option for a replacement of Windows XP.

**So, it is obvious that your life is not over with the "end of the life" of Windows XP !**

Good luck with whichever option you chose !

If you do choose to keep your Windows XP Operating System, you should be aware that it **may not be totally secure without the security patches from Microsoft**. Be sure it is as well protected as can be with good Security software and be extra careful on the Internet when downloading files and clicking on links !

Whichever Operating System you use, and ***especially if you chose to keep using Windows XP***, it is vital that you install good security software !

I usually recommend, "**Kaspersky Internet Security**" as it is one of the best Security Suites.

I also recommend running **Malwarebytes** at least once a week or after you've been surfing the Internet. It can be downloaded from this link..... <https://www.malwarebytes.org/>

Another good program to keep your computer clean is **Cleaner** which can be downloaded from this link...  
<http://www.piriform.com/>

Some Security Web Sites also suggest, and I agree, using either **Google Chrome** or **Firefox** as your Internet Browser, rather than Internet Explorer, as they are both more secure.

When downloading programs from the Internet be vigilant that no other unwanted programs are being installed along with the program you intended. Many program installations will have a small box with a checkmark asking you to agree to install another program as well. Be sure to uncheck this box. Many of these "Bonus" programs are nothing but "Bloat Ware", unneeded useless programs, and may contain Malware infections.

Be careful of pop-up messages on Web Sites. If a Site suddenly tells you that you need to install "Flash" to view it, and you know you already have Adobe Flash installed, don't click on the message! Doing so may install a "Browser Hijacker" such as "Conduit Search" that takes over your Home Page and your Search Engine. If you do need Flash to view a Site just close the Site and download Adobe Flash from [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com) then go back to that Site again. If you use Google Chrome you don't have to worry about installing Flash, it's built in to the Browser.

Anti-virus programs do not usually catch "Spyware" programs such as Browser Hijackers because they are not considered a virus.

**Don't risk infecting your computer and those of others.**

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