

Radio Days – 2012-10-20

Tip of the Week – Keep All Your CDs

I recently had to reinstall Windows on a client's computer because it had become riddled with viruses and they were not prepared to wait for an offsite virus removal. These usually take about three days and involve taking your computer to the repairer. The repairer will then do their magic with your computer and return a working system with all programs and data intact.

Because my client was not prepared to wait they insisted on having Windows reinstalled now! There was the usual time wasted while an extensive search was undertaken for all the various CDs: both those which had come with the computer and those which had been purchased later.

Some programs, of course, had been downloaded from the internet so it was no problem to download them again. Some suppliers also had my client's serial numbers still available so these could be emailed to my client before we started the reinstallation of Windows. Even for those programs whose suppliers had gone out of business there was no problem to download the program again: there are sites on the internet which carry long-forgotten versions of almost all programs which have ever existed.

The problem was retrieving all the installation keys from long-deleted emails. There were cheat installation key generators available as programs on some websites, but these programs often turn out to be a virus in disguise so I cannot recommend them to anybody.

The search for everything was now over and it was discovered that there were missing CDs and installation keys, as well as the programs which had been downloaded from the internet, so the decision to use the services of a professional virus removal firm was made.

This was the only sensible decision in the circumstances.

The moral of this story is that you should keep all your CDs in one place and also keep a record of all installation keys for downloaded programs as well as the programs. Yes, this can be a pain when you just want to get on with installing and using your new program, but it can pay massive dividends when you want to reinstall Windows or copy everything to your new computer.

There will be a similar problem when they buy a new computer and want to reinstall all their old programs on their new computer. I tried to point this out but, once again, there was a disconnect between what they were hearing and what would happen on the ground.

Reaching The End-Of-Life

Computer components, both hardware and software, have a limited useful lifespan. I well remember losing a client many years ago because he was not prepared to hear that he would have to buy a new computer every few years to keep up with the demands of his business. He expected that a computer should be built to last at least ten years and that the software to run the computer should be available for that time too.

Volvo, the Swedish car maker, wanted to find out if people would buy a car built to last for 25 years of trouble-free motoring. The answer was a resounding **NO!** Most people wanted to buy a new car every few years so that they have the latest technology and the most admired car in their neighbourhood.

In New York city some years ago a fire station had a light globe over their its front door. This globe had been burning, non-stop, for over 75 years. Then, one day, the inevitable happened and it burnt out. The company which made the globe had gone out of business long before because not enough people bought their long-lasting globes, so the fire station had to make do with a new globe which would only last a year or two. This is the price which we pay for having our consumer society.

The same holds true for the computer world. Companies which make computer software need you to buy a new version every year or two so that they can continue in business. All the companies which write the software which I support will only support the current version and the previous version of their software.

Hardware has a similar problem. If the actual hardware does not wear out within a few years then the company which makes it will stop producing drivers for later versions of Windows. A driver is an essential part of computer hardware: it is the program which allows Windows to know how to talk to the hardware. It is, if you will, the translator between Windows' commands for the hardware and the hardware itself.

All this was brought up because a client had decided to upgrade its computers from Windows XP to Windows 7.

Printers

My client had two excellent laser printers which had done sterling service since about 2000. These two printers had never missed a beat in all those years. The only maintenance needed in all those years was to put paper in at one end and toner in at the other. There was never any thought that they would not work for ever and a day.

Then came the new computers with Windows 7 installed. These new computers had been bought at this time because Windows 8 is due out on 26 October and it appears to be a dud on desktop computers. The only way to ensure that they had a working set of computers was to upgrade before Windows 8 became the only way to go.

After installing the new computers and restoring all the data which had been saved from the old computers the old printers had to be installed. The CD which came with the printers had drivers for Windows 98, Windows ME and Windows 2000. This gives you some idea of how old these printers are!

The next step, of course, was to check the manufacturer's website for a driver for Windows 7. The driver appeared to be present: the website stated that it was for both Windows Vista and Windows 7 so I downloaded the driver's installation program. The next step was to find the exact sequence for installing the driver.

There were instructions for installing the driver on Windows Vista but not for installing on Windows 7. After trying the obvious installation techniques I had to admit defeat. These old printers were now only good for the scrapheap. This is akin to forcing people to retire at the tender age of 65 whether they are too old for their work or not.

The printers are working well but they cannot work with Windows 7 without a driver so they will be put out to pasture.

Driver Changes

Microsoft got into major problems with Windows Vista because it started to enforce strict standards for drivers for all hardware installed on a Windows Vista computer. In the *laissez faire* world of Windows XP, and earlier versions of Windows, any driver could be installed without problem. This, of course, led to many computers not working as they should and Microsoft being blamed for all the problems.

To resolve this problem Microsoft introduced *driver signing*. A signed driver is one which has been certified by Microsoft as complying with the standards needed by drivers. Before a driver can be signed it has to be sent to Microsoft and Microsoft people will inspect the driver and its operations before allowing it to be installed on any Windows computer.

This signing of drivers is becoming more and more necessary as more and more people are trying to get access to your computer. Because badly-written drivers were both an easy route for getting into a computer and a source of instability, Microsoft felt that it had no option but to sign drivers. For most people this whole process is transparent. It only becomes important

when you are installing a printer, or other device, which does not have an up-to-date signed driver for your new operating system.

This is what caused my client so much grief.

The solution was simple: buy a new printer to replace these two old ones. Because the dollar is currently so high against the US dollar these new printers, from a respected manufacturer, were very cheap. As usual, the toner cartridge is only a starter version: a new toner cartridge will be needed shortly.

Now, with their new printer, my client can print from any of their new computers. The old printers will be donated to a recycling depot.

Software End-Of-Life

Just as hardware reaches its end-of-life, either because it has died or because it is no longer being supported on a new operating system, so software reaches its end-of-life. With software the end-of-life is caused when the manufacturer no longer provides support.

This support comes in two forms:

- Tech support will no longer provide telephone support for problems with the product
- The manufacturer will no longer provide updates for the product to fix errors in the system

Of course, just because a software manufacturer no longer supports old versions of a program it does not mean that the program stops working. If it was working well before support stops then it will continue to work well. You will no longer receive support so you will have to rely on your own devices.

With accounting programs, end-of-life comes when the second version after yours is released. It also means that your version will not get new tax tables: you need to buy the new version to get new tax tables.

In the good old days you used to be able to enter the tax table formulae into QuickBooks to update your tax tables to the new version. Also in the good old days you used to be able to download the trial version of MYOB and copy the tax tables from that version and use them in the new version. These days are long gone! Now the manufacturers of these programs make you buy the new version to get the new tax tables.

Microsoft also stops support for its programs after a while. Windows XP will continue to get support for much longer than normal because so many people refused to install Windows Vista because of its problems. However, even support for this venerable and much-loved version of Windows will soon cease. If you are thinking of getting a new computer to replace your old Windows XP one then I suggest that you start planning for this new computer now. Microsoft will soon stop selling Windows 7 so you will need to work out whether you can live with Windows 8's new look.

Do you remember the fuss when Windows XP came out with its new look? People hated it at first and I expect that they will also hate the look of Windows 8 on desktop and laptop computers. Be prepared.

Further Information

None this week.