

Radio Days – 2013-08-10

Tip of the Week – Is Windows XP Dead Yet?

During the past week or two I have met a number of people who are still using Windows XP on very old computers. These computers were around ten years old but still working as well as their owners wanted them to. This was not the problem.

The problem was that every one of these computers was running outdated software. This is unusual in my experience because most of my clients make sure that their most-commonly used programs were up to date. All of these computers were running an unpatched version of Windows XP.

Windows XP has had Service Pack 3 since its release in May 2008: this is over five years ago! This means that each one of these computers has not been updated since that time. At least with Windows 7 most users have downloaded and installed all the updates because Windows is installed with that option enabled. Windows XP, in contrast, has not had automatic updates installed automatically as is true in later versions of Windows.

Not updating Windows (any version) is asking for trouble. All viruses and other malware are written to take advantage of all computers which are not protected as far as possible. This means that versions of Windows XP which have not been updated to Service Pack 3 (SP3) are vulnerable to attack.

This is especially true in the case of the people whom I have seen recently. All of them have not updated their copy of Windows, and all of them were running an old version of AVG Free. Most of them were running AVG Free 2010 (only three years old!) and one client had at least updated his version of AVG Free to version 2011! This is dangerous because you are almost inviting the virus into your computer to wreak all the havoc that it can muster.

If you are still running Windows XP please update your computer to SP3 for maximum protection.

Correcting Images

During the week I had the misfortune to be asked by a client to help him recover an image which had become corrupted.

The problem was caused by my client trying to send a photo of a family gathering to a family member who had not been present. The image was far too big to be included in an email as he had discovered when it had bounced after a previous attempt to email it. He had just attached the photo to an email the first time then, to his horror, found that his email had bounced because the image was too large.

He then used a program which I did not recognise to resize his image. He was not sure what size the image should be so he resized his image by making it 99% of the previous size. This had the unfortunate side effect that the image became more and more “blocky” each time he resized his image.

By the time the image was small enough to be emailed it was almost unrecognisable and I was called in as a last resort to recover the image so that his brother in Canada could actually recognise the people in the photo.

There were a number of errors in this process and I would like to go through them in turn.

JPEG Images

All cameras will take jpeg (Joint Photographic Experts Group) images. This is a standard format for images so there are many programs which can manipulate this format. It is a format which reduces the size of an image to make it easier to send photos by email and so that they take up less room on your camera’s memory card and on your hard disc. It manages

this trick by removing information which is not used by the eye to see detail in the photo. This is similar to the way that is used to make MP3 music files smaller. In MP3 files the data removed is not noticed by your ear. An example is a faint sound masked by a loud drum beat will be deleted because the ear cannot hear the faint sound over the loud drum beat. This results in a smaller sound file, but the downside is that, each time the file is saved, some of the information in the sound file is lost for ever. A similar process is used in the jpeg file format, and the same type of data loss happens each time the file is saved.

This is referred to as *lossy compression* and is used in a number of types of file. There are other types of compression which do not remove information from the original file. The trick is only to make one size reduction so that the maximum amount of data is retained.

Work on a Copy of the Image

My client had reduced the size of his image so many times that he had made the photo so bad that he could not send it to his brother. He then asked me to recover the image so that he could start again and get it right the first time.

Recovering an image which has had so much information removed by each successive save is impossible. The data is gone just like your wallet if you leave it in a shop by mistake.

To avoid the damage to your image being permanent I strongly urge you to make a copy of the image before you start to make changes. Any other course of action leaves you wide open to tearing your hair out in a mad and furious frenzy.

There are two ways of making a copy of an image. The first, and the one that I recommend, is to use Windows Explorer (sometimes called My Computer) to find the image then copy and paste the image, preferably into another, working, folder. You should then only work on the copy and leave the original in case there is a catastrophe.

The other way to make a copy of an image (or of any other file) is to open it in the appropriate program the immediately *Save As* to save as a new file, again preferably in another folder. This makes sure that you have the copy to work on, and you always have the original image in case you need to start again. Preparing for disaster before the disaster makes sense after the disaster has happened!

Recover an Image

Once an image has been degraded as much as my client's photo had been there is nothing that can be done to recover the image, and there is no process which will undo the damage done during many saves of a jpeg image. The damage has been done, and there is nothing that can be done to restore the image.

Your only hope of getting an image back into shape is to recover it from some form of backup. Some people copy their photos onto an external data storage device (CD, DVD, USB stick or external hard disc) or to one of the many cloud storage services. Some people keep the original image on a camera memory card and buy a new memory card when the old one becomes full.

Whatever way you keep copies of your images, it is important that you can get to that copy of your image when you need it, and you will only ever need it in an emergency!

Sending an Image by Email

The way to send an image by email is to use Windows Explorer (often called *My Computer*) to find the image. Once the image is found you then, from the menu, select *File » Send To » Mail Recipient*. This allows you resize your image to a suitable size for emailing without the problems of resizing an image using an image editing program. This is the easiest way to email a photo.

You can also select a number of images using either Shift-Click (to select contiguous images) or Ctrl-Click (to select individual images). Once you have selected the images which you want to send to your friend you then select *File » Send To » Mail Recipient* and create your email.

Microsoft has gone to a lot of effort to make life easier for you: you can save yourself much angst if you take advantage of their efforts.

Further Information

Windows XP SP3 www.support.microsoft.com/kb/322389