

Goodbye Windows Me, 98 & 95

Microsoft and McAfee have reached the End of Life dates for their Windows Me, 98 & 95 products. They're officially no longer supporting these older software versions. How does this impact you? Does this mean that continuing to run these systems in your business is playing Russian Roulette with your office and patient information?

In this article we'll examine the risks of continuing to run PCs with older Operating Systems. We'll also propose some strategies for dealing your older systems, without breaking the bank.

You may have heard suggestions that keeping old PCs may end up costing you more than you save. Aside from mechanical failures, you may not know that older PCs are more vulnerable to security attacks and are more likely to suffer from software incompatibilities. So what are the risks of keeping those old PCs running?

Risks

Throwing Good Money after Bad

There's the old rule of thumb that says when your monthly automobile repair bills start to approach a new car payment, it is past time to buy a new car. As your computer systems age, they also need more maintenance - including software patches, troubleshooting and dealing with worn out components. In addition, older systems become increasingly expensive to upgrade as their hardware becomes obsolete. Software updates become more difficult, too. It isn't unusual to run into a critical software upgrade that can't be installed on an older PC, or that can only be installed with special fixes and work-arounds that are only discovered after spending hours searching the Web or on the phone with a software vendor. Getting someone to help you with these problems is expensive. On-site support costs for these types of issues can quickly escalate. To add insult to injury, there's also the cost of lost staff productivity while these PCs are down.

What is End of Life?

End of Life for software typically means that the manufacturer is no longer providing updates or support for that particular version of the program. For Microsoft Operating Systems (including Windows Me, 95 & 98), End of Life means that Microsoft is no longer creating system "patches" or "critical updates" to these Operating Systems. This makes these systems vulnerable to malicious corruptions to the Operating System and other programs.

For McAfee, End of Life means they will not guarantee that future virus definition updates (which typically are released daily) will work with this version. They also don't sell a "new" centrally managed version of software for Windows Me and Windows 95/98 Operating Systems.

(See [Microsoft End of Life](#) and [McAfee End of Life](#) for their announcements.)

Leaving the Door Open to Intruders

Anyone who follows the news is aware that computer security threats are a very real problem. The damage done by viruses and information theft ranges in the billions of dollars annually. A breach in your front lines can mean downtime, lost productivity and angry patients. Older systems are less able to defend themselves against attacks. They can't take advantage of the latest security software. To top it all off, HIPAA privacy and security laws place greater pressure than ever on medical offices to protect patient information.

Decreased Staff Productivity

We're all aware that employees are less productive when their PCs are out of commission. Aside from having to find other ways to accomplish their tasks, there's also the time they spend arranging for repairs and reorienting themselves after their computer has been serviced. What you may not have realized is that employees become relatively less productive as their computers age (even when their PCs don't have down time due to repairs). In 2002, Intel studied the productivity benefits of upgrading existing Pentium III PCs to new Pentium IV PCs running Windows XP. They discovered that employees spent 3% more time accomplishing the same tasks on the older computers. That translates to a week and a half of lost productivity for every employee over the course of a year!

Strategies for Dealing with Older PCs

So what are your options? You can do anything from leaving your PCs alone to creating a PC replacement schedule. The cost estimates below assume your practice is on a FredMed Service Level and you're currently using FMH's McAfee Anti-virus software.

- **Upgrade Your Existing PCs** *Cost ~\$600 per PC*
An upgrade to a Windows Me, 98 or 95 PC would typically involve upgrading the Windows Operating System and adding additional RAM (memory) and the associated labor to install it all.
- **Implement Your Own Anti-Virus program that Supports Older Operating Systems** *Call FredMed for Options and Cost Estimates*
There are a couple of anti-virus vendors that still sell products for Windows Me, 98 and 95. However, it is unknown when these manufacturers will end support for these Operating Systems.
- **Remove Older PCs from the Network & Remove McAfee**
All PCs connected to the FredMed/FMH network are required to run an Anti-virus package. You could redeploy some of your older PCs, removing them from the network and using them for stand-alone

processes. (Note: In most offices, this will mean that you won't be able to access your practice management system from these PCs.)

- **Continue As Is**

Cost unknown

Pay for hourly support and deal with the reduced productivity of employees when the systems have problems.

- **Create a PC Replacement Schedule – Current and Moving Forward**

Cost ~\$1,000 per PC

Overall, a plan for ongoing system upgrades and replacements during your budgeting process is recommended for all of our sites. A good rule of thumb is 3 years for upgrades and 5 years for replacement.

The cost estimate is for new Dell PC that meets current standards, with a three (3) year on-site warranty and a 17" flat screen LCD monitor. Our estimate also includes the cost for FredMed to configure the new PC for your office. Note: - you may be able to reuse your existing Microsoft Office licenses (from your old PCs).

FredMed Recommendation

It is our recommendation that local medical offices seriously consider pursuing an aggressive schedule to replace any Windows Me, 98 & 95 PCs. If you have several to replace, you get the best return on your money by replacing them in blocks, perhaps 4 to 7 PCs at a time. There may also be additional savings available from Dell depending on how many PCs you buy a one time.

Purchasing and installing the PCs in groups makes a swap from the existing equipment faster (less FredMed labor cost) and less stressful to staff. What you will gain is an up-to-date PC that better enables you to maintain HIPAA compliance with a three year warranty.

In any of the scenarios listed above FredMed Hourly Labor can be purchased in "blocks" of 4 or 7 hours (in combination and multiples of). Four hour blocks save you 17% off of our hourly rate. Seven hour blocks reflect a 24% discount.

Other FredMed sites that have upgraded to Windows XP have seen their monthly support costs reduced by having more reliable equipment installed. There is also less employee downtime by having new, reliable (and faster) PCs in place.

Your FredMed technical support professional would be happy to discuss these options further with you.

