Always be Ready for a New PC

Thirty years back, Intel and Microsoft used to tell me that a computer lasts three years. Now they tell me that a 'modern device, less than three years old' boosts productivity. The message hasn't really changed.

I won't call a three-year old computer old, but between Covid and the Windows updates after Windows 7 being free, and running well on old hardware, with a lot of solid-state drive upgrades, a lot of you are running computers that are more than seven years old, and that's getting to be risky. Office computers should be replaced following some planned schedule, and not just by waiting for them to fail. That's partly for productivity, and partly because a replacement-

by-disaster policy doubles the cost of replacement, because that approach adds a rush repair of old hardware. That's planning for downtime and scrambling for missing software disks, data recovery, and rush shipping, That's avoidable.

Computer moves can become expensive if there are no backups, the old PC is broken, and there is no list of installed programs and license keys. But a normal move is typically not a large project, and I can usually move a user from a working old system to a new computer in around two hours, depending on which programs are installed. The actual amount of data isn't usually a factor; it's the connections, the software and the connections to other hardware or services.

Google claims that these things are trivial. I have it on good authority from a VP at Google who just switched computers the morning before he came to the DC Convention Center to present a slide show about the cloud. He just logged into a new Chromebook, and everything was there. And users of Microsoft's Office 365 that store their files in OneDrive will see all their email and documents as soon they log in, for the same reasons. But I have yet to find any actual non-sales-rep that has managed to have 100% of their work in the cloud. For everyone else, a new computer means moving stuff.

Nearly everybody uses a few programs that do work beyond just email and spreadsheets, so there are those 'vertical apps', basically software that's specialized for your work. Even accounting and job costing turns into different programs in different industries, and each of those programs have their own data, and some odd way of storing that data that has only slightly evolved since the DOS days, and sometimes hasn't moved at all since then.

Most of those specialty programs are databases, and many hold confidential information (credit card numbers, social security numbers, anything that has medical or financial information), so those products have to be installed locally; they're poor candidates for the cloud. These are the programs that need special attention when you move to a new system.

So let's cover what to expect when moving, or just being ready for emergency computer replacements.

First, a definition. A 'profile' on a Windows computer is your login, along with what goes with it. That's the 'My Documents' folder, the folders for pictures, music, downloads, and videos, shortcuts (favorites, bookmarks) for each browser, your email files from Outlook or Thunderbird, and more. It's basically all your stuff that's not software, and not network folders. The profile can be a very large folder. I usually see profile folders between 5 and 20 Gb, but have seen them much larger for anyone doing a lot of video editing or graphic arts work.
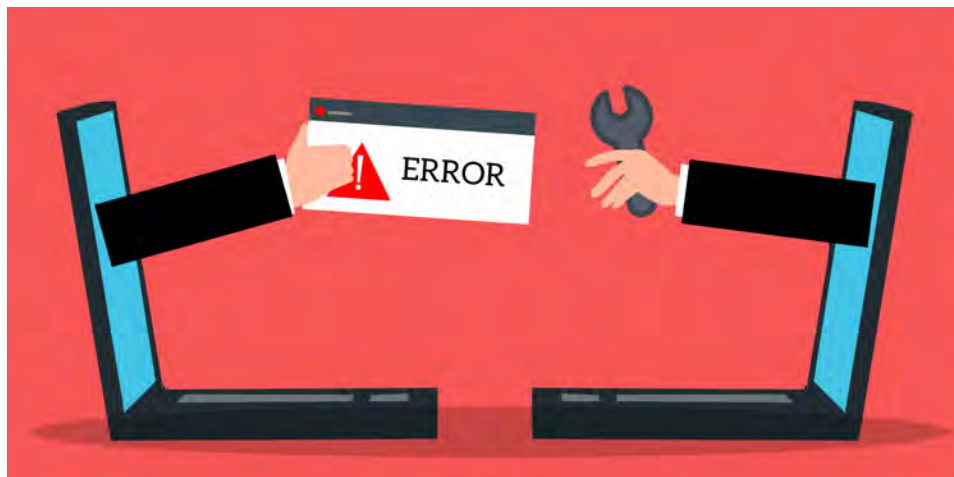
All computer techs can copy a profile during a computer move. We can do that manually if needed, but usually, we use software to do it, as it saves a lot of time putting every setting and shortcut in the right place, and those places can change if the Windows version changes.

And a professional computer move includes matching the list of software, with a lot of "Do you still use this one?" questions, over to the new system. The free programs, like Adobe Reader, are easy. The industry-specific programs, those verticals, require manual handling, and sometimes manual data export and import, and calls to tech support.

Did you Back Up your Setup Files?

When moving to a new computer, I can move settings, and data, and reinstall any popular free software products, and most of that is automated. I pick the programs off a list, and they appear. So that's easy. But software products that you bought have to be manually reinstalled, so when you ask me to move everything over to a new computer, I will ask for the installation or setup file or download link, the key code or serial number. Some programs are easy, like QuickBooks: On the old computer, start QuickBooks, press F2, and look for the product name, license number and product number. QuickBooks setup programs are available for download, and just need those numbers.

Subscription Software

Microsoft Office, BOTH as an Office 365 subscription and as the one-time "product key card" versions, require you to log into Office.com during setup, so you will need the email address and password that you used to create your Microsoft account. There is no DVD for recent Office versions. Office versions older than 2013 should be replaced, not reinstalled, as there are no more security patches for the old versions.

Cloud is easy:

Products that run in web pages are easy. You will need the product web page link (shortcut), your login name (user or email), and your password. There is usually no software to install for these products.

Action Items:

If you plan to move to a new system soon, or just need to be ready to move:

- Have a good backup in place. 'System' backups include profile folders and software, so if you only have one kind of backup, use the 'system' type of backup.
- Maintain a list of the installed programs you have bought and still use. For each product, if there was a download for the install, back that up. Keep a PDF of the email that contains the download link and the installation key. A printout isn't usually enough; we need a working download link.
- For vertical apps, the specialty products, we will need the technical support contact information and account numbers. Don't drop technical support payments on vertical applications without knowing what they cover; some of the largest software companies are charging very high fees to move old data to their new cloud products. They see clouds as being very sticky and are taking advantage of that, so the time to find out how they do business is long before you need to move to a new computer.
- Keeps notes on your other office technology. The usual problems are with photocopiers, but you need notes on each device connected to your network. Keep a three-ring binder of tech notes for your office. Remember that when you will need it, you could be offline. Record model and serial numbers, when it was installed, by whom, the warranty, tech support contacts, and configuration notes.

For computer help, call 410-871-2877
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