



Red River

WHAT THE

**END OF WINDOWS SERVER 2008
AND WINDOWS 7 SUPPORT**

MEANS FOR YOUR BUSINESS



Whether it's operating systems or hit HBO series, all good things must someday come to an end. On January 14, 2020, Microsoft will end its extended support for two of its most widely adopted OSes, Windows 7 and Windows Server 2008.

This is a fairly major development; Windows 7 has been a very popular OS for both businesses and personal users -- reaching levels of market penetration well ahead of Windows Vista, Microsoft's previous flagship platform. While not quite at the same level as Windows 7, Windows Server 2008 has also been very widely adopted; a 2016 survey found it the most popular server OS, with a 45.4% adoption rate.

If your business is currently using Windows 7 or Server 2008, what does all of this mean for you? Should you upgrade? In this ebook, we will explore the end of the Windows lifecycle, what it means to upgrade -- or not to upgrade -- your businesses OSes, and the effects this may have on your organization.



WHY SHOULD YOU UPGRADE?

Before we discuss the benefits of upgrading to a more modern OS, it is important to know what, exactly, it means for Microsoft to end extended support for an operating system. Microsoft marks two particular end-of-support milestones in its typical Windows lifecycle: end of mainstream support, and end of extended support.

The end of mainstream support is the earlier of the two; for Windows 7 and Windows Server 2008, that date is well past us -- Microsoft ended mainstream support for these two operating systems on January 13, 2015, which meant it would cease developing additional features or non-security hotfixes.

However, Microsoft's developers would continue to develop security updates and hotfixes for Windows 7 and Server 2008 until the end of the extended support, which is what is swiftly approaching. At that time, all further development will cease on these two operating systems -- even for security features.

This means that on January 14, 2020, if your business uses either Windows 7 or Windows Server 2008, you will no longer get updates or hotfixes, even if there's a massive security vulnerability similar to the EternalBlue exploit that led to the notorious WannaCry cyber attack.



There are a number of reasons why your business should strongly consider upgrading to a newer operating system -- and if you haven't started planning your transition yet, you should do so very shortly.

- **Not upgrading means greater security risks.** As previously mentioned, Microsoft will no longer be fixing any newly discovered vulnerabilities or exploits. This means that even if your employees are perfectly trained and will never fall for any phishing attacks, your organization is still at risk if new Windows 7 or Server 2008 vulnerabilities are discovered. This puts you, your employees, your data, and your business in danger.
- **Microsoft will no longer offer technical support.** If you have a problem with your discontinued Windows versions after the end of support, you're on your own. You won't be able to contact Microsoft's customer service for aid after the end of extended support.
- **You may be in violation of compliance.** Depending on your industry and the compliance factors governing your work, running an out-of-date OS can put you at serious risk. You may be out of compliance if you aren't up to the latest patch -- which, after this point, will no longer be possible.
- **New software may not be backwards compatible.** At some point, software developers will no longer release versions of their applications that are fully compatible with older operating systems. While this may take much longer than the end of Microsoft's support -- some developers are releasing versions of software compatible with Windows Vista or even Windows XP -- it will eventually happen, especially for software that must be regularly maintained.

With all of these drawbacks, why are some businesses choosing to not yet upgrade? A 2018 study found that despite the end of service rapidly approaching, 43% of all businesses surveyed were still running Windows 7.



Many organizations have reasons for remaining on old operating systems that seem perfectly valid at first, but which do not fully hold up under scrutiny -- or which trade immediate short-term benefit for long-term risk.

- **Upgrading is too expensive.** It can, indeed, be expensive to purchase the newest operating system for all of your employees and servers, especially if you'll be coupling the software migration with a hardware refresh. However, putting off this cost will open you to productivity and security risks. It may wind up costing your organization more to not upgrade.
- **We can't spare the time or loss of work.** This one also has a grounding in fact; upgrading operating systems can impact an employee's ability to work, or if you're running an online service, the uptime of your servers. Again, this is a short-term gain with a long-term cost -- if you have to take your servers down to address a security breach, it may take longer than it would have to upgrade the OS.
- **If it ain't broke, don't fix it.** Your organization and its employees may be used to Windows 7 or Server 2008, and change can be frustrating. It's tempting to stick with what you know to be tried and true. It's true that on January 15, 2020, most things in your Windows ecosystem will work the same as they did the day before. However, there will be some changes – Windows 7 users who do have not purchased extended support will no longer be able to connect to Office 365 ProPlus. Furthermore, the longer you delay and keep your business on outdated software, the more likely a serious interruption will become.

This isn't to say that the arguments for upgrading are solely based on the bad things that might happen if you don't migrate to the latest software. There are many benefits to upgrading your business' operating system as well.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF UPGRADING?

It may be tempting to shrug off the potential pitfalls of failing to upgrade as a bridge your organization will cross when you reach it. If you remain on older versions of Windows, however, your business will be left behind technologically. Whether you're upgrading a PC or a server, let's look at the positives of what you'll be getting.

..WINDOWS 7 TO WINDOWS 10?

Windows 7 was an excellent operating system beloved by millions, but as of this year, it is a decade old. The world of technology was a much different place then. The mobile revolution was still in its early stages -- the iPad would not be revealed until the next year, for instance -- and neither the IoT nor cloud/SaaS solutions were as ubiquitous as they are now. The newest Windows versions have been designed with years of additional knowledge and experience, and as a result, are simply more modern.

- **It's a more secure OS.** The Windows 10 development team had cybersecurity in mind when they began work on their new operating system, and the aforementioned years of knowledge and experience make it simply safer to use from a security standpoint. No system is completely impregnable, but the security toolkit built in to Windows 10 far outpaces the one native to Windows 7.
- **The search features are much improved.** Anyone who has tried to search a cluttered hard drive for a particular file whose name they don't remember knows that in the past, searching files on a Windows PC could be a headache. It's much more intuitive on Windows 10, and the OS finally gets the "Universal Search" feature right, adding web results to your searches where applicable.
- **There's better integration with modern devices.** There were no Windows 7 tablets, but there are plenty of Windows 10 tablets and 2-in-1s. As a result, the OS and its apps are natively designed to work equally well on a PC, on a laptop, or on a tablet, making it easy to take your work on the go.
- **It's designed for cloud services and apps.** Thus far, many of your favorite cloud services and apps may have offered Windows 7 versions, Chrome apps, or other ways to use their services on a Windows 7 PC. However, as previously mentioned, Windows 10 was designed for the modern app ecosystem, which means that app integrations tend to be better with Windows 10 than they are Windows 7.

There are multiple benefits to upgrading your employees' computers to a modern OS, but you shouldn't neglect your server operating system, either.



...WINDOWS SERVER 2008 TO A MODERN SERVER OS?

There are several options available for a more modern server OS. Windows Server has three more recent versions -- Windows Server 2012, 2016, and the new 2019. Alternatively, you could do away with on-premise servers entirely and move your business into the cloud with a system like Microsoft Azure.

Obviously, we recommend upgrading to a more recent OS if possible -- otherwise, you will have to switch again sooner rather than later -- but upgrading your server OS has its own benefits.

- **Newer servers are more secure.** As with the personal software versions, the latest releases of Windows Server have been designed with cybersecurity in mind. Your business' data will be much safer on a newer server than an older one.
- **They support technologies that simplify many once-frustrating tasks.** Hyper-V, which allows server virtualization to reduce disruption when upgrading server hardware or software, released alongside Windows Server 2008, but newer versions include it free of charge -- and wholly integrated. This is just one technological advance server admins will appreciate in modern versions of Windows Server.
- **Cloud services require much less maintenance.** Alternatively, having no on-premise server at all is now a viable solution. Migrating your business to the cloud will save time and effort that you used to spend on server maintenance, and you'll likely see fewer disruptions.

Whether you're changing individual or server operating systems, this also becomes an ideal time to change not just the software, but the hardware it runs on. A full hardware refresh for your business, getting rid of slower PCs and older servers or other devices, can have incredible, positive impact on your employees' productivity.



WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSIDER BEFORE THE UPGRADE?

The good news is that while upgrading your OS may not necessarily be easy, it's usually much easier than it used to be -- and easier than many people believe it to be. Microsoft offers tools to help automate the OS migration process which can be a lifesaver, particularly for small businesses that may not have dedicated IT personnel.

Indeed, the most complex part of an OS upgrade may, in fact, be the planning stage. Rather, it may be helpful to think of it in these terms: The more you plan your OS upgrade, the smoother it'll likely be.

- **What are the hardware requirements?** Does your business' hardware meet the minimums for Windows 10 or a new Windows Server version? Is it close to the minimum? If yes, you might want to embark on a hardware refresh first, as previously discussed.
- **Which version of Windows is the right fit?** For personal versions of Windows, this could mean deciding between Windows 10 Pro or Windows 10 Enterprise; for servers, you could be debating between Windows Server 2016 or 2019 if, for instance, you prefer to let an OS settle for a few years before adopting it. Don't forget to consider 32-bit vs. 64-bit OS operating systems.
- **What apps will you need to replace?** Most software will run just fine on the newer OS once you've upgraded it, but that doesn't mean everything will. This is particularly true if you're using older or proprietary software that may need to be updated -- or replaced.
- **Who upgrades first?** The larger your company, the less feasible it is to migrate everyone to the newest OS all at once. The wisest solution is to designate groups of employees who will have their technology upgraded together and to roll the new OS out in batches across the company.

It is worth noting that at present, there does not exist a direct upgrade path from Windows Server 2008 to Windows Server 2016 or 2019. You will have to either wipe the server for a fresh, clean install or upgrade first to Windows Server 2012, then to 2016 or 2019.



WHEN WILL YOU HAVE TO UPGRADE AGAIN?

After upgrading your OS, it's understandable that you don't want to upgrade again too quickly. The more recent the OS or service you switch to, the longer you'll have before needing to upgrade again.

- **Windows 8:** We passed the end of mainstream support on January 9, 2018. The end of its extended support will be January 10, 2023.
- **Windows Server 2012:** We passed the end of mainstream support on October 9, 2018. The end of its extended support will be October 10, 2023.
- **Windows Server 2016:** Its end of mainstream support will be January 11, 2022. Its end of extended support will be January 11, 2027.
- **Windows Server 2019:** Its end of mainstream support will be January 9, 2024. Its end of extended support will be January 9, 2029.

Windows 10, however, is not quite so simple. It is Microsoft's first OS under the "Windows as a Service" (or WaaS) framework. As such, it has a rolling life cycle, with its end-of-service dates being extended as one upgrades to newer versions. We have already passed several of the Windows 10 end-of-service dates for older versions, but the OS will continue to be updated and, as such, will remain fully patched and relevant for the foreseeable future. To this end, we do not know when Windows 10 will be replaced by the next "full" version of Windows -- if ever.

We hope you found this ebook about the end of life for Windows 7 and Windows Server 2008 useful. If your business needs to upgrade from Windows 7 or Server 2008, contact Red River today to learn how our experts can help your next OS upgrade.



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