

Computer Corner

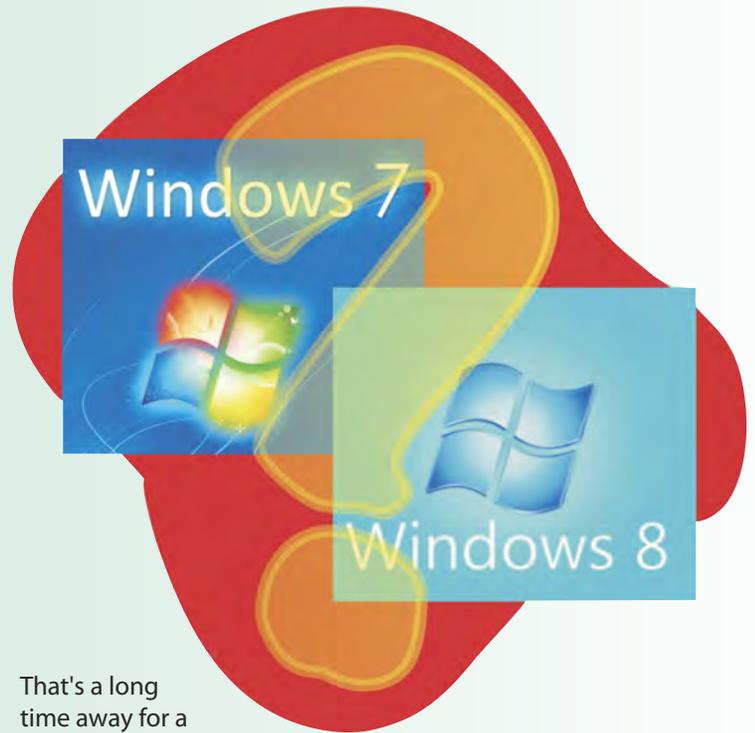
Ready or Not – Windows 8 Is Here!!!

It doesn't seem like very long ago that the buzz was all about the NEW Windows 7. Most Windows users were pleasantly surprised that right from the start, Windows 7 worked well and had many new useful features over their old dependable Windows XP. Windows 7 seemed to have very few hitches and allowed for a smooth transition compared to some of Microsoft's new operating system releases over the years. It took a while and a number of improvements for Windows XP to earn its customer's trust, but for the most part Windows 7, has been dependable from the start.

Only a few users in the water industry, with older electronic meter reading systems, found their automated reading system did not get along well with Windows 7. Windows 7 Pro and Ultimate versions even have an XP Emulator option to use with old programs that are not able to run with anything past XP.

Well, it's that time again. Microsoft released an entirely new operating system, Windows 8, in August 2012. Most new computer systems are being shipped with Windows 8 preinstalled.

Now, don't panic, according to Microsoft's Web site, the currently scheduled support end date for Windows XP is 4/8/2014 and Windows Vista is 4/11/2017. Windows 7 will not cease to be supported until 1/14/2020. 2020?



That's a long time away for a typical computer.

OEM Sales of Windows 7 with a new computer purchase and sales of Windows 8 with downgrade rights to Windows 7 is scheduled to continue through the end of 2014, after which according to the current schedule, Windows 8 will come standard with a new computer purchase, like it or not!

Most OEM computer manufacturers will continue to offer professional and business computers with Windows 7 preinstalled and a disk or free download available to switch to Windows 8 at a later date at least until the end of 2014, should the purchaser prefer Windows 7.

It is likely there is not a good reason at present to make the change to Windows 8, but it's a good time to learn what is available.

To upgrade or not – that is the question

Why care about Windows 8 if Windows 7 does the job? Or, for that matter, why care about Windows 7 if old, time-proven XP is still serving the office well? It is likely there is not a good reason at present to make the change, but it's always a good

time to learn what is available. If nothing else, Windows 8 gives us a glimpse to the future, at least according to Microsoft.

A touchy business

Those who are accustomed to using a Smartphone or Xbox360 game machine are already well on their way to being at ease with Windows 8. Windows 8 is designed to run on nearly everything: traditional desktop computers, laptops and tablets. For Smartphone users, the Windows 8 Metro interface will have a familiar touch operation of finger swipes, with touch tiles that are swiped, scrolled and tapped, or touched to make selections. It will also work with a mouse and keyboard.

Windows 8's main improvements over Windows 7 are listed as a Touch-based Interface, Improved Security with built in Defender protection and a Factory Reset Option, a Tap-to-Share feature to exchange information with other wireless devices, improved performance and speed claimed to be from 30 percent to three times faster than Windows 7 in some functions, a new Microsoft Windows 8 app store (similar to Apple's App Store for iPhone and iPad applications), and more.

Some water departments may see great potential in the new, highly portable devices like the Microsoft Surface Windows 8 Pro pad that could be employed in field work for functions like work orders and other field worker records, perhaps even as a poor man's meter reading system. KRWA's Tech Assistants who travel from one city to another or a water district may find these lightweight devices a handy means of record keeping. "Surface Windows 8 Pro" (MSRP 64GB version \$899 / 128GB version \$999, not to be confused with the lesser capable "Surface RT" \$499 for the 32 GB version) is like an iPad. This petite, 10-inch tablet and keyboard (of sorts) built into the cover, runs standard Windows 7 and 8 programs. It has no standard hard drives and only a limited internal storage capacity with a tiny built-in Multi-media card (either 64 GB or 128 GB). All other data storage for this device is external in the form of USB drives or SD Memory Cards. Data can also be uploaded for 'Cloud' storage, i.e. data stored by a service for a monthly fee like Microsoft's new Skydrive Cloud data storage service, which, coincidentally just happens to be built into the Surface Windows 8 Pro device.

Sharing data in public folders on the 'Cloud' with the new Microsoft Skydrive data storage service can be useful. For example, a public notice

could be made available to all with a posted link on a Facebook page or email. The advantage of the increasing popularity of Cloud services like Skydrive is the ability to access data from anywhere, at anytime over the Internet. Windows 8 lists your Microsoft Cloud SkyDrive location along with any other data storage options on the Computer screen.

I have and use a SkyDrive account ... and yes, I use its ability to share files and to send updates of large files to customers. Allegedly, with its security features, you can be confident that it will share those files only with those persons selected and given the appropriate link. With decades of experience in the computer industry and familiarity with some of the weaknesses of online data storage; knowing that even government agencies have had their online data hacked, I recommend caution. I personally have had to close all our bank accounts and cancel all credit cards and get new cards because of a credit card company's so-called SECURE online Cloud-based data system. Instead, that service allowed my personal information to be stolen from their online system.

There is no denying these "Surface" products are nifty little devices, but given the rather hefty price tag perhaps at this time the cost exceeds the benefit. And, as for paying monthly fees to a service to store data, there are certainly some applications this lends itself to, though I won't be putting my sensitive financial information on the Cloud until the only other option is to keep my records on a big chief tablet.

Is upgrading to Windows 8 a good idea?

Not everyone thinks the populace should make a mad dash for



Windows 8. For example, Rafi Kronzon, co-founder and managing partner at Cartwheel, an IT consulting and support company based in New York City, put it bluntly: "If you are not using a tablet, there is absolutely no reason to install Windows 8. On a traditional computer, it's unintuitive, clunky, and obtuse."

My wife Linda has a new laptop; it has Windows 8 Pro... and I purchased an extra copy to install for additional testing on a desktop computer just because our customers will start to have it. I tend to agree with Mr. Kronzon and many like minded people in the industry. Even Microsoft representatives are recommending that businesses upgrading Windows XP computers continue to upgrade to Windows 7.

When a small Kansas town had to replace an old computer, I was able to use the XP Emulator feature in Windows 7 to save them a \$13,000 electronic read upgrade charge they would have been forced to pay if they had moved to Windows 8. Windows 8 is missing the XP Emulator like in Windows 7 Pro & Ultimate, so IT WILL NOT work with older software popular in the water industry like the Symantec Q&A program or some older electronic meter reading systems.

Some industry experts have speculated that the new Surface Windows 8 PRO with its 64 and 128 GB storage options, ability to run any standard Windows 7 or 8 applications, and use up to 7 GB of FREE Microsoft online "SkyDrive" storage is simply Microsoft's way of staying viable in a future that sees the American consumer moving more and more to MOBILE devices. Some industry experts suggest that instead of focusing on what is best for the end user, Microsoft's announcement of Office 2013 offered as a subscription, Windows 8 with its focus on mobile devices that lack storage abilities, SkyDrive and other new Internet Cloud services are simply aimed at ensuring a continuous income flow in subscription and lease fees. In other words, Microsoft is looking forward to getting into its customer's pockets on a monthly or yearly basis, collecting a regular fee, rather than just anytime their customer chooses to upgrade.

Tips for getting started with Windows 8

Those consumers who do decide to take the leap into Windows 8 are often first startled by the absence of the START button users have become accustomed to after



years of various Windows versions. If the user desires to see the classic desktop screen they have been expected to, they must select the Desktop Tile or press the Windows Key for this familiar fare.

Perhaps one of the changes that takes the most getting used to is finding the new location for the Shutdown button. There are over two dozen Windows Key shortcut combinations to quickly move to the desired screen. The most frequently used ones will probably be: Windows Key to toggle between Metro Style Tile Start screen and classic Windows Desktop screen minus the start button, Windows Key + I will display the Info screen that includes the Power/Shutdown button, Windows Key +C to see Charms screen settings, Windows Key + L to Lock and return to the screen you are on.

What's the benefit of Windows 8?

I don't believe there a benefit to move to Windows 8 at this time. So, except for testing purposes I intend to stick with Windows 7 for the time being. I hope this article provides readers some things to check into and consider before deciding if Windows 8 is a good fit for their office or home computer. I like my Intel i7 laptop just fine with Windows 7 Pro, although, I do have my eye on one of those Microsoft Surface Windows 8 Pro devices, providing the prices improve.

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