

Windows 7 Mainstream Support Ends

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Shades of Windows XP. Extended support for Windows XP ended on April 8, 2014. XP users had to upgrade to Windows 7 or to Windows 8.1. Most upgraded to Windows 7 because of dissatisfaction with Windows 8.1.



Now, less than a year later, Windows 7 users are told that they must upgrade to Windows 10. The good news is that users of Windows 7 and Windows 8.1 can upgrade to Windows 10 at no cost for one year after the general availability of Windows 10 later this year.

Windows 7

Windows 7 was released on October 22, 2009, less than three years after Windows Vista. It was intended to replace the heavily criticized Windows Vista, which was plagued with device incompatibilities and other problems. Windows 7 added many new features to Windows XP, the most obvious being a redesigned task bar that allows applications to be pinned to it.



Windows 7 is an extraordinarily successful operating system. Only eight hours after it became available, its sales surpassed the demand for Windows Vista in its first seventeen weeks. Windows 7 sold 100 million copies in its first six months and is now approaching 700 million licenses. It powers over 50% of PCs worldwide (Windows XP runs on about 25% of PCs, and Windows 8.1 runs on about 7%).

The End of Windows 7 Mainstream Support

Microsoft defines two levels of support for its products. A newly released product is under *mainstream support* until the announced date for the end of that support. The announced end date for mainstream support for Windows 7 was January 13, 2015.

The product is then covered by *extended support*. From the inception of extended support, no new Service Packs will be released, nor will any new features be added to the product. Extended support typically is in effect for about five years. Following the end of extended support, the product is effectively dead. There will be no new security patches or performance upgrades. Customers can continue to use the product, but unless they pay a heavy maintenance fee, they are on their own.

Extended support ended for Windows XP back on April 8, 2014. Extended support will end for Windows 7 on January 15, 2020, five years from now. In order to be eligible for extended support on Windows 7, the operating system must include Service Pack 1.

Microsoft explained:

“Every Windows product has a lifecycle. The lifecycle begins when a product is released and ends when it is no longer supported. Knowing key dates in this life cycle helps you make informed decisions about when to upgrade or make other changes to your software.”

Microsoft wants users to move to Windows 8.1 or to Windows 10 when it is released later this year.

Windows 8.1

Microsoft's first attempt at a replacement for its venerable Windows 7 was Windows 8, which was released on October 26, 2012. Windows 8 was a disaster. Microsoft had designed it to support its touch-screen tablets. Users found its interface confusing and difficult to learn, especially when used with a keyboard and mouse. Most users refused to upgrade.

To correct this situation, Microsoft released Windows 8.1 a year later on October 17, 2013, giving just one month's notice for the end of support for Windows 8. Windows 8.1 reintroduced the familiar keyboard and mouse interface as an alternate interface that could be selected. However, most users stuck with Windows 7.

The end of mainstream support for Windows 8.1 is scheduled for January 8, 2018. Extended support ends January 10, 2023.

Windows 10

For some reason, Microsoft skipped Windows 9. Windows 10 was unveiled on September 30, 2014, and will be released later this year. It is offering many new features, including three-dimensional holograms using special eye wear.

Microsoft is offering a free upgrade from Windows 7 or Windows 8.1 for one year following the release of Windows 10. This is a first for Microsoft. Traditionally, there is a cost to upgrade.

Apparently, Microsoft is taking a different support approach with Windows 10. According to Microsoft's Vice President and Windows chief Terry Myerson, Microsoft now thinks of its Windows operating system as a service that should be kept current for its supported lifetime rather than as a product. Just as it does not make sense to ask which version of an Internet service someone is running, likewise it should not make sense to ask which version of Windows someone is running.

To achieve this, Microsoft will implement a tiered rapid release approach for critical updates, security patches, and non-critical updates to Windows 10. Users will receive these as they are released (a user can opt out or delay installation of non-critical updates if it wants). In effect, Windows 10 will be updated in a manner similar to that of how smart-phone operating systems are updated.

Summary

Windows XP lasted for thirteen years. Windows 7 and Windows 8.1 are slated to last for just ten years. However, Windows 7 and Windows 8.1 users can upgrade for free to Windows 10 within the first year of the release of Windows 10.

There is some indication that Microsoft's support policy is changing for Windows 10. Windows 10 may be the Microsoft operating system for the foreseeable future.

Acknowledgements

Material for this article was taken from the following sources:

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