

HOW DENTISTS CAN PREPARE FOR WINDOWS 7 END OF LIFE

by Darby TechForce



After years of using the same technology to run your business, upgrading can feel intimidating. This is especially true when it comes to updating your computer's operating system. What if it looks different? How will you handle technical problems? Will the learning curve impact daily operations? These fears have held many dental offices back from upgrading their workstations from Windows 7 – praised for its ease of use and appealing visuals – to Windows 10.

Alas, all good things must come to an end, and Windows 7 is no exception. In January 2020, Microsoft will discontinue support for its beloved operating system. This change is significant for dental practices, as running an unsupported operating system comes with serious risks and potential penalties. Luckily, you still have plenty of time to update your workstations before the big shift takes place. Here's how dentists can prepare for Windows 7 end of life.

Why do I need to upgrade to Windows 10?

While learning a new system is inconvenient, failing to upgrade to Windows 10 puts your entire practice at risk. Behind your computer screen, hackers and viruses are constantly trying to break through the firewall that protects your network from cybersecurity threats. When a virus finds its way through a "hole" in the operating system, Microsoft locates the vulnerability and fixes it. Then, Microsoft releases an update with a security patch to prevent future viruses from infecting your computers.

As of January 14, 2020, Microsoft won't be releasing security patches for Windows 7. Whatever condition the operating system is in that day, it will stay that way forever. Without regular security updates, computers running Windows 7 will be vulnerable to cybersecurity attacks that could expose patients' protected health information and other sensitive data.

What's more, running an unsupported operating system is not HIPAA compliant. While HIPAA doesn't explicitly state that running Windows 7 will be a violation, it does express that "procedures for guarding against, detecting, and reporting malicious software" must be in place. If you're not running a supported operating system that has security updates, compliance with this rule is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

The best course of action for protecting your patients' data and your practice from non-compliance issues is to start thinking about upgrading to Windows 10.

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The idea of updating all of your computers at once probably seems daunting – and expensive. Luckily, you don't have to tackle it all at the same time. Updating your office computers is similar to presenting a complex treatment plan to a patient. When someone needs a lot of dental work done, you break up the case into different stages. This makes the treatment easier for the patient to tolerate and they don't have to pay for everything in one lump sum.

Transitioning your dental practice to Windows 10 can be treated the same way. If you've had your computers longer than four years, you'll need to buy new hardware before upgrading, which will be a significant expense. Once you determine how many workstations need to be upgraded in your dental practice, spread out your investment over the next year and a half. For example, buy two new computers every three months. By staggering the transition, it gives everyone in your office time to adjust to the new system and allows you to plan from a budgeting standpoint.

In addition to updating your computers, it's important to make sure your server is up to speed. Along with Windows 7, Microsoft will also discontinue support for Windows Server 2008 on January 14, 2020. This means no more security patches to keep viruses from attacking your server. Most servers that are still running Windows Server 2008 should be updated with new hardware. The system requirements to run Windows Server 2016 are much higher and require more sophisticated hardware to continue backing up your data efficiently.

It's time to upgrade to Windows 10. We've got you covered.

Change can be scary, but so is the potential for exposing your patients and your practice to hackers, viruses, and other cybersecurity threats by running an unsupported operating system. Windows 7 end of life is on the horizon, and we know from an investment perspective that you need time to plan for this change. If you're confused and overwhelmed, let us help.

At Darby TechForce, we can do an analysis of your network to get an inventory of the computers in your office and what operating system is on each. Then, we can partner with you to develop an upgrade plan that works with your budget. The key is to start planning now so you can avoid a major financial impact at the last minute.

Give our friendly dental IT experts a call at 1-800-886-2093 to schedule your free assessment.