

Technology

You Wouldn't Eat Rotten Fish, So Don't Use Rotten Software

BY DANIEL J. SIEGEL

If you eat food past its expiration date and it has spoiled, you could suffer a fever, chills, stomach cramps, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. Or if it is really bad, you could contract E.coli, listeria, or salmonella.

Now, imagine if your computer contracted the electronic versions of these conditions and got sick. Computer software also has “use by” dates, commonly known as the end-of-life (EOL) date. These are dates after which a software developer, such as Microsoft or Apple, no longer supports its products. And just like their edible counterparts, using expired software could make your computer sick.

So why do computer users continue to use software no longer supported by the developers? Usually, they do it because they either did not realize their software was outdated, or they were too “frugal” to purchase the latest updates. No matter the reason, when software support ends, developers no longer proactively protect users from security risks, such as viruses, malware, and ransomware. In those situations, using unsupported, often called “end-of-life,” software, makes your computer and others on the same network more vulnerable to risks that could easily spread to other computers.

Computer hardware and software were not meant to last forever. In most cases, computer hardware is designed to last a few years. In some cases, such as smartphones, their useful life is often



limited to one or two years. When the useful life ends, commonly so does support.

Windows XP is an example of the problem. When Microsoft stopped issuing updates and patches, the software became significantly more vulnerable to security threats. In addition, software vendors often could not guarantee whether their designed-to-be-compatible applications would continue to be compatible. Despite this reality, some users could not let go and continued to use Windows XP. Currently, an estimated one in 25 computer users continues to use XP despite the fact it was released 19 years ago and has not been supported for more than 6-1/2 years.

That I am even writing about Windows XP is telling. Support for its successor, Windows 7, ended on January 14, 2020. This turned out, coincidentally, to be the same day that Microsoft released an emergency update for Windows 10, an update prompted by information provided to Microsoft by the National Security Agency.

Microsoft had previously explained the dangers of still using the software: “If you continue to use Windows 7 after support has ended, your PC will still work, but it will become more vulnerable to security risks and viruses because you will no longer receive software updates, including security updates, from Microsoft. Microsoft strongly recommends that you move to a new PC running Windows 10 to avoid a situation where you need service or support that is no longer available.”

In addition to Windows 7, support for numerous other Microsoft products will end in 2020, including most products included with Microsoft Office 2010 and 2016, such as Outlook, Word, and Excel. The perils of EOL software apply to numerous software and hardware items from other companies. For example, support was scheduled to end on April 7, 2020, for the 2015 standalone/classic versions of Adobe Acrobat DC and on October 1, 2020 for WinZip 21.5. Support has already ended for Windows 10 versions 1703 and 1803.

Many users never check to see if they are running unsupported software. But they should; and if they discover they're using outdated products, they should update or upgrade immediately. For example, to determine which version of Windows you are running, go to <https://support.microsoft.com> and type in "Which version of Windows operating system am I running?"

It is critical to note that using a firewall, antivirus software, and other security suites does not protect against unpatched or unpatchable dangers and are an invitation to hackers to do their dirty work. Thus, there are many risks of running unsupported software, including the following:

Security vulnerabilities: Because manufacturers only release security fixes in limited (and always dangerous) situations, EOL products are replete with security hazards.

- **Software incompatibility:** New software products are designed to work better with newer operating systems and other software.
- **By using EOL products,** you may not be able to upgrade other software, which can also become security threats.
- **Lack of support:** If your software is at EOL, there is probably no technical support for it, which means that any questions you have about how to use it will probably not be answered.
- **Unanswered questions can lead to mistakes,** which can impact security and functionality.
- **Compliance issues:** If your practice includes working with regulated entities such as health care providers who deal with sensitive and confidential information, use of outdated software could expose you and your clients to risks that could endanger their company or lead to fines and other risks.
- **Poor quality:** The older your hardware and software, the greater the likelihood that these items are no longer under warranty. This leads to a greater likelihood of breakdowns and the increased costs associated with such breakdowns and repairs.

- **Slow performance:** New software and hardware run more efficiently—that is, faster—than their older counterparts. End users, such as your staff, often do not realize how much time is wasted waiting for programs to load, for websites to appear, and other computer actions. Upgrading to new hardware and software can dramatically improve your office's productivity.

The Center for Internet Security (cisecurity.org), a nonprofit devoted to safeguarding private and public organizations from cyber threats, publishes a monthly End-of-Support Software Report List in recognition that "the process of finding [EOL] dates and locating all the instances of obsolete products can be a difficult and time-consuming task."

Situations when a firm may need to use unsupported or outdated software are generally rare. In those circumstances, it is important to balance the benefits of running the software against considerations such as whether there is a newer, and supported, product that meets the firm's needs. These decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the firm's IT staff or consultants.

Because many firms do not inventory the software on every user's computer, it may also be helpful to perform a network inventory. One helpful free product is Spiceworks Inventory, a downloadable program that automatically inventories all of the PCs, Macs, Windows, and Linux servers, switches, etc., on your network, helps you track warranties and the age of your system, and provides other helpful reports.

In summary, end-of-life hardware and software pose huge risks for law firms. With appropriate planning, you can avoid the dangers of "sick" software. Difficult or not, getting rid of EOL products should be a priority. ■

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TP-Link AC1750 Wi-Fi Range Extender



Netgear Nighthawk X4 AC2200 WiFi Range Extender



Amped Wireless Athena-EX High Power AC2600 Wi-Fi Range Extender

UPGRADE YOUR HOME INTERNET to handle an influx of work, family, and entertainment duties with a wi-fi extender. A wi-fi extender might be for you if you can't place your wi-fi router in a centralized location to service all areas of your home. An extender can boost your signal to reach far-off places, such as your garage or yard.

So, from the basic plug-and-go to those with multiple ports, how do these wi-fi extenders compare?

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BEST FOR	THOSE LOOKING FOR FAST SPEED AND EASY INSTALL.	EXPERIENCED USERS LOOKING FOR FAST SPEED AND MU-MIMO SUPPORT.	THOSE LOOKING FOR FEATURES AND PERFORMANCE.
SIZE (HxWxD)	6.4 X 3 X 1.2 INCHES	6.3 X 3.2 X 1.7 INCHES	1.5 X 10.5 X 8 INCHES
FEATURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ONE GIGABIT LAN PORT • 2.4GHZ BAND – 450MBPS • 5GHZ BAND – 1,300MBPS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ONE GIGABIT LAN PORT • 2.4GHZ BAND – 450MBPS • 5GHZ BAND – 1,733MBPS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 GIGABIT LAN PORTS • USB 2.0 PORT AND POWER • USB 3.0 PORT • 2.4GHZ BAND – 800MBPS • 5GHZ BAND – 1,733MBPS
PROS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EASY INSTALLATION – JUST PLUG IT INTO AN OUTLET • VERY GOOD RANGE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EASY INSTALLATION – JUST PLUG IT INTO AN OUTLET • SUPPORTS MULTI-USER MULTIPLE INPUT, MULTIPLE OUTPUT (MU-MIMO) STREAMING 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EASY INSTALLATION – JUST PLUG IT INTO AN OUTLET • SUPPORTS MULTI-USER MULTIPLE INPUT, MULTIPLE OUTPUT (MU-MIMO) • MULTIPLE PORTS
CONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BULKY • NO PASS-THROUGH OUTLET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BULKY • NO PASS-THROUGH OUTLET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MU-MIMO SUPPORT IS MEDIOCRE
PRICE	\$61.81	\$149.99	\$237.99



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