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End of Support for Windows XP a Danger to Tech Freedom

– David Taber, CIO

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What could be less news than the end of Windows XP support? Everybody on the planet has been told about it a hundred times. This article concerns the real danger you haven't been reading about.



The IT industry has been blessed with being very lightly regulated, with self-regulation that works and minimal government interference. This has meant high rates of innovation and profitability, nearly a commercial nirvana that supports millions of families' lifestyles. Even the legal community hasn't been able to mess it up, with the exception of the sloppy software patents and the resultant [trolls](#).

[[Impact of XP: The Revolution That Was Windows XP](#)]
[[History of XP Looking Back at the Windows XP Era](#)]

IT grew up in the glass house, only entering the consumer space in the last 30 years. So its sensibilities are not highly developed when it comes to consumer attitudes and the political dangers of "bad optics." This was first made plain by Intel's [floating point SNAFU](#) of 1994, and was still plenty evident in the iPhone's [death-grip antenna](#) problem of 2010.

Let's compare this with the auto industry, which has product recalls seemingly by the week. The vendors all know they have to balance public opinion and bad press against short-term cost-avoidance. Sometimes they get it spectacularly wrong (think Ford Pinto), but most of the time they come across as doing the right thing for the customer. Of course, an automobile is a bigger investment than a PC, and its failures can cause bodily harm and property damage.

Even with all that, the auto industry doesn't shut down an old product that is somewhat risky to use. I own a 1963 Studebaker: It is still allowed on roads, I can use modern gasoline and all the current auto infrastructure. Imagine if GM were to one day declare that their cars from even 25 years ago were no longer allowed on the roads, and that anybody driving them should be considered a danger to themselves and anyone else on the highway. Imagine if they were to put out a bunch of articles telling owners "you must send your car to the crusher by April 8!"

Computation has become a required feature of modern life, at least in North America. If millions of computers fail, disruptions to power supplies, money supplies, and food supplies are not out of the question. A PC is no longer an optional luxury item, and has acquired "utility" status in most U.S. homes and businesses. So PC vendors can't act capriciously.

Microsoft supported Windows 1.0 -- a technical quagmire -- for 15 years. But when it came to XP -- the world's most popular operating system of all time, with a solid technology foundation -- support ended only three years after Microsoft stopped selling it. It's amazing there have not been more inflammatory articles and exposés.

A Ticking Tech Time Bomb

So far, Microsoft has gotten away with telling 30 percent of the world's PC owners that they must now junk their property. And they may well get the number of systems running XP down below 100,000,000 this year.

[Slideshow: [9 Reasons Users Won't Ditch Windows XP](#)]

Even if that all works out for them, there's the big risk that will linger for years. That risk: Some high-profile DDoS attack that leverages those increasingly vulnerable XP systems. Information technology causes the zombie apocalypse.

The inevitable response from vendors trying to avoid legal culpability will be to blame their customers. "Customers were warned" about the dangers of using products that were top-of-the-line just a few years ago.

Blaming your customers never plays well, and if the issue goes viral, we'll have a three-alarm fire:

- Politicians in the U.S. and Europe will sense the opportunity for self-aggrandizement. Hearings, hassles and draft legislation will cause laughter among IT vendors (recall Ted Stevens' "[the internet is a series of tubes](#)"). But the government does have a legitimate interest in preventing abuse.
- The courts both in the U.S. and EU still have jurisdiction over Microsoft, thanks to its monopoly status. Even though the XP action is well within the bounds of the consent decrees, the breadth and visibility of XP's demise will make the courts receptive to regulators and civil cases.
- Enterprising attorneys in the U.S. will sense the profit opportunity in bringing a class action suit. The plaintiff class comprises hundreds of millions of PC owners at home and in business. As always, it won't matter if the attorneys bringing the case can win in court -- they will use every bit of pressure from the press and social media to push for a quick settlement.

Microsoft's maneuver is a gamble that is putting IT's cherished freedom from regulation and frivolous lawsuits at risk. That's the alarm bell you should be hearing.

What Does This Have to Do With CRM Systems?

CRM systems are not just about making quicker sales. The whole point of these systems is improvement of customer relationships and facilitation of all customer-facing business processes. CRM systems let you identify and rectify these issues:

- Where your sales prevention department is.
- What your customer dissatisfaction department is up to.
- What policies and processes are getting in the way of profitable and growing business relationships.

The high ground for any CRM initiative, then, is to find and facilitate your most profitable customers while measuring and improving customer satisfaction. But all the CRM investment in the world cannot

counteract the impact of an anti-customer policy. All it can do is measure the depth of the crater.

David Taber is the author of the new Prentice Hall book, "[Salesforce.com Secrets of Success](#)" and is the CEO of [SalesLogistix](#), a certified Salesforce.com consultancy focused on business process improvement through use of CRM systems. SalesLogistix clients are in North America, Europe, Israel, and India, and David has over 25 years experience in high tech, including 10 years at the VP level or above.

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