End of Life Systems

Ethical IT's experiences and lessons learnt

Technology

- Windows Server 2003
- Microsoft XP / Windows 2000
- Database Applications (SUN, Vision, Raisers Edge, QuickBooks)
- Microsoft SharePoint 2003

Background

All software eventually goes out of date. Most workplaces rely on Microsoft operating systems extensively, and replacing these systems can be daunting.

However there are some steps any organization can take to minimize the cost and disruption of replacing operating systems that are beyond their end of life.

Considerations

Almost all social change organizations qualify for license purchases via CTX or TT Exchange as it's now known. This national scheme enables charities to buy software that is effectively "donated" by companies like Microsoft, Adobe, Symantec and Cisco. Microsoft purchases via CTX include "Software Assurance" which entitles you to free upgrades for 2 years.

Software Assurance can also be purchased and/or renewed on older products, and should be discussed with CTX or your license provider (one good provider for charities is Phoenix, see further reading at the end of this document)

Finally, if you are not eligible for CTX, you can purchase Academic or Educational licenses and Software Assurance at still greatly reduced rates, to cover upgrades in future.

Where you use – or are considering purchasing - other applications such as SAGE, QuickBooks, Raisers Edge, SUN Accounts etc, you should always ask the supplier if the purchase includes support and if that support includes future upgrades. Do not underestimate this inclusion - we have seen examples of applications like SAGE running on very old versions because upgrades were not included at the time of purchase, and it has ended up costing them more to subsequently upgrade prior to a general company-wide system update, as the old version was not compatible with newer versions of Windows.

Suggestions

- Check your contract with the current suppliers to see if your software includes Software Assurance or updates in future. Especially if you are running older versions of software and are considering a general refresh, as this may be a big factor
- Ensure you are fully registered with CTX (it's free) and have a clear idea of what products you are eligible to buy from them, before you approach other providers. Share this information with them, as it will help them build your new Proposal in the most cost effective way
- There are many excellent refurbished computer providers out there that can replace a Windows XP computer with a Windows 7 machine that will be perfectly adequate for normal office use – often for as little as £150!
  http://www.microsoft.com/refurbishedpcs/buy.aspx
- If your IT Provider is quoting you a lot of money to replace computers or upgrade software, it can't hurt to get a second opinion. Consider asking a general question to a forum of IT Professionals, for free, via the LASA email list of IT Professionals.
- It sounds obvious but collating a full list of your IT "estate" is vital. Often a lot of info gets missed such as Database / specialist program version numbers, a definitive list of 3rd Party vendors and account numbers / account managers, internet line phone numbers, Microsoft licensing centre login details, Domain DNS Control Panel details (ask your website providers) all should be collated, and you should then speak to the application providers to ask what a version upgrade might cost so you are able to plan for the future.

Further Reading

LASA IT for Charities knowledgebase - http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/index.php?id=home

CTX Exchange - https://www.ctxchange.org/about_tt-exchange

Charity license vendors - http://www.ctxchange.org/useful_links/other_suppliers

Testimonial

"Moving to EIT's cloud environment has meant the local PCs we run, and their age - even though they are older versions of Windows which won't be supported forever - carry a lot less significance to the network, and don't need to be replaced with expensive workstations when they do eventually fail; they can simply be swapped out with cheap "dumb terminals" which saves support and cost"

Darryn Lapham, Transport Benevolent Fund