THE COMPUTER HELPER

Windows 8 On Its Way

The newest version of Microsoft Windows will soon be hitting shelves.

The release date has tentatively been set by Microsoft for Oct. 26.

Here is a link to the Microsoft site that describes the new version:

http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-8/release-preview

The biggest change is that the new version of Windows has been engineered to work and look the same on desktop computers, laptops, tablets, and smart phones.

This standardization will be helpful down the road as more people turn to tablets instead of computers. It means that, if you have been using Windows 8 and decide to buy a tablet that has Windows, the learning curve will be gentler.

One of the downsides is that the learning curve to figure out Windows 8 itself will be pretty steep.

Windows is completely revamping its "desktop," the first page you see when firing up the computer. Gone are the little icons you've come to know and love. Instead, the front screen will have large and small blocks for each of the programs. The good news is that you will be able to have several pages for those blocks, instead of being forced to fit all your icons on one page.

The new version also features "swipes" where you drag a finger or mouse across the page to change pages or options. The hope is that the programs will be eliminating some of the "double clicks" that can sometimes be challenging with a mouse.

Here's the most important thing we can suggest:

Don't even think about upgrading your existing computer to Windows 8.

This isn't a slam on the platform. This is the exact same recommendation we made with every single version of the Microsoft operating systems since Windows 98.

We'd make the same recommendation on buying the first batch of a new automobile model.

Every version of Windows originally included bugs and problems, not to mention that nasty old learning curve. Every version had a "fix," called a "Service Pack." Usually, by the time they come out with Service Pack 2, they've got it figured out (although with Windows ME, they never managed to get that system right).

Our recommendation is to wait at least three months before even thinking about upgrading. It will give Microsoft time to work out the kinks. Once Windows 8 is released and vetted by real-world users, we'll be able to offer you better guidance as to when will be the right time to upgrade (if ever).

So relax. Your Windows XP, Vista or Windows 7 versions will continue to work just fine for now.

This Month's Special: Senior Appreciation Month

We appreciate, respect, and admire our "seasoned" clients. It requires a lot of courage to try and learn about something like a desktop computer that didn't even exist when those in the "over 50" set were still in school.

To show our appreciation for those brave enough to try, we're offering our biggest discount of the year. If you've been putting off a repair or service, or you're ready to learn something new like an iPad or Facebook, the month of August will be a great time to "git r done."

COMPUTER DUDE
Still Some Life In Windows XP

We are sad to report an impending death in the computer world.

It's not a person...it's our good friend, Windows XP.

Microsoft has announced that they will stop supporting Windows XP as of April 8, 2014.

What does that mean to you if you have XP on your computer?

Absolutely nothing!

The only thing that stops is Microsoft's research on bugs, security fixes, and updates for peripherals like printers.

As long as your computer is running well (and if it's XP, it probably is) and you don't add any new programs, you won't notice a difference.

Eventually, you'll be forced to give up XP if you want to use the latest software, because new programs will be written for Windows 7 and Windows 8. Some will have what we call "backwards compatibility," meaning the new program may still run on Win XP, but that number will shrink.

But for now, don't lose any sleep over it.

We've been in the computer business since before Windows was even a gleam in Bill Gates' eye, going back to the days of DOS.

Over the decades, we can say without equivocation that Windows XP has been one of the best, most stable platforms Microsoft has developed since Windows 98.

In fact, in rating Windows, here are our favorites:

1. Windows XP
2. Windows 98 SE
3. Windows 3.11

The worst?

1. Windows ME
2. Windows Vista
3. Windows ME

Notice Windows ME was listed twice. It was *that* bad. In fact, it was so bad that we've often joked the term is a swear verb and vulgarity among, as in "ah, go Windows Me!"

Over the next year or two, Microsoft and some of their preferred vendors and software makers will be doing their best to scare you into upgrading to a newer version of Windows with dire statements that warn "Microsoft will stop supporting XP soon, so upgrade to the latest blah blah blah." Don't listen to them.

The only thing that might get dicey is if you're using an old version of Internet Explorer.

There are already websites that don't work right with the original Internet Explorer 6, and demand that you upgrade to a newer version.

But thanks to Firefox and Google Chrome, you now have options.

That issue aside, don't worry about your Windows XP becoming obsolete. Like some of your dearest friends, it won't be as fast or as pretty as some of the hot new models, but it is tried and true and will still be fun and comfortable for you.

Computer Help Club To Meet Aug. 30

The next meeting of the Computer Help Club will be held Thursday, Aug. 30 at 5 p.m. in the Community Room at the America First Credit Union located at 590 W. Mesquite Blvd.

The topic for this month will be Open Office, a FREE suite of programs that rivals Microsoft Office. It includes a word processor like Word, a spreadsheet program like Excel, a database program like Access, and a presentation program like Power Point. We'll be going over the word processor and spreadsheet programs.

Also, this month's free CD of shareware handed out at the meeting will include a full copy of Open Office, as well as a copy of Malwarebytes.

To see more on Open Office, go to http://www.openoffice.org/product/index.html

The meeting starts promptly at 5 and ends at 5:55 p.m.

The meeting will also include question-and-answer time, so bring along any questions or problems you've run into lately.

The Computer Help Club is for members and their guests. Membership is $25 per year. For more information on membership, go to www.CompuHelpUS.com.

LINKS WORTH A LOOK

Here is a list of interesting websites we've found over the last month:

Spider Solitaire
A solitaire card game almost as addictive as Freecell.
http://www.cardgamespidersolitaire.com/

Flight Aware
Track flights on a map. Shows where plane is located during flight, along with info on arrival gates and delays.
http://flightaware.com/

Medical Dictionary
Merriam Webster dictionary of medical terms.
http://www.merriam-webster.com/medical

Guitar Chord Guide
For guitar players and those learning how. Site shows fingering positions for every chord.
http://chordguide.com/guitar

Earthquake Map
Provided by U.S. Geologic Society, it shows interactive map of most recent earthquake activity. Interesting to see how many minor earthquakes occur near Mesquite!
http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/map