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Windows 98

Microsoft Corp. recently made news by first announcing the end of product support for the Windows 98 PC operating system, and then reversing the decision in the face of customer resistance. Why the flip-flop? A recent survey of 670 corporations (with 372,000 computers) revealed that 27% of their computers were running Windows 95 or Windows 98, compared to less that 7% using Windows XP, Microsoft's latest operating system.

History - A DOS Legacy
A computer's "operating system" is the software that allows the machine to communicate with its various parts and run application programs, like word processing. Windows 95/98 and ME operating systems are based on the DOS operating system created for the first Personal Computers. This software was originally designed for a single, personally controlled machine, and assumed that all code (program instructions) on that PC belonged there. This assumption resulted in unrestricted access to any user files. Moreover, who would need to work with more than one program at a time?

- Windows? Glass openings to outdoors.
- The Internet? Not even a dream.
- Email? Fax machines were state-of-the-art.
- Computer security? The guard in the lobby.

In that DOS era, Bill Gates famously asked, "Who would need more than 640K of memory?" Now, even the most basic PCs have 100 to 200 times that much.

Weaknesses
Despite years of upgrades and patches, these old DOS-based operating systems have two major shortcomings:
1. Fundamental security flaws, and
2. Inability to use added, or all available, PC memory.

- The security flaws arise from new technologies available to hackers and data thieves that exploit what one writer called "the naively trusting nature" of the file system. As attacks from viruses and worms become more prevalent, security risks increase.

- The second shortcoming becomes apparent when a user attempts to run several application programs simultaneously, as promised by "windows," or a single memory-intensive program. In those instances, the PC bogs down, or simply crashes.

Solutions
Windows 2000 and XP deliver improved performance from the user's perspective because they better utilize PC resources, especially memory, and are more stable. Unfortunately, both are

still prime targets for hackers. Linux and Mac systems are not yet practical options for most Windows desktop/laptop environments.

If you are running Windows 95/98/ME, ensure that all computers are current with Microsoft security updates. Also investigate unproductive user time because of slow performance and/or frequent system crashes.
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