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Managed IT Services, PC Consulting, Sales, & Service in Central Maryland

Product Recommendations Aren't Forever

I recommended that? In what century?

It's great having long-term customers, and some of you have been working with me for a quarter-century now. You have long memories, and I thank you. However, not every product I've ever recommended is worth looking at years later. There are a few old product suggestions popping up lately that I just have to stop and say no, disavow, get rid of it, don't buy, don't buy...

Why? Nothing stays best-of-breed forever. Products get old, get mangled by publisher updates that were subject to committee arguments and allowing marketing to control

features, or strangulation by a budget, or sometimes smaller products just get left to drift.

Samsung

Yes, I'm a Samsung dealer, for now, and I currently still like their solid-state drives, this year. But their Samsung Galaxy Note 7 cell phone has made all the news reports, exploding like, well, like a Samsung washing machine, also in the news. If you own either of those products and haven't checked out your options yet, information is at the very top of this page:
http://www.samsung.com/us/

To make matters worse, Samsung has sold their printer division to Hewlett Packard, the company with both the worst software drivers and the worst technical support in the printer category. So I'm recommending Brother printers, and yes, I'm a dealer for their entire product line.

And next year, new product releases from Intel will likely take over the high end of the solid-state drive category, so that will leave no Samsung products that are both best-of-class and not dangerous.

Mozilla Update Check

The free plugins updater online at Mozilla.org is OK, but it's limited to updating Firefox and is very manual, compared to what's available elsewhere now. And Secunia's PSI, or Personal Software Inspector, is now under a new name, Flexera, and it's over-engineered and complicated, strictly for advanced users.

Currently, the best program for checking most of the popular free programs and plugins on your computer, and automatically updating them, is PatchMyPC's free software updater. (https://patchmypc.net/download) It will search for every program it knows about, and update the entire list with one click. Run it monthly. Bonus: It can install software on its list for you as well, although I'm not necessarily recommending that entire list.

Or call me; I can automate updates, and have them run quietly in the background, $5/workstation/month, slightly more for servers.

IBM/Lotus Symphony and Open Office

These free office suites are actually still pretty good, but they're based on the same software as LibreOffice, and are no longer being updated with new features, while LibreOffice, which is also free and open source and available for both Windows and Mac, continues to improve. For example, for the multi-monitor users: IBM Symphony lets you open one spreadsheet at a time, while LibreOffice opens multiple spreadsheets for side-by-side work. Basic PDF editing is built into LibreOffice Writer.

Document formats haven't changed: LibreOffice reads and writes the Open Document Format files created by Symphony and OpenOffice, as well as Microsoft Office documents. Switching over between these suites is painless; the menu layouts are recognizably similar, and the formulas carry over without changes. LibreOffice can be installed by PatchMyPC, above.

Security Software

The best-in-class anti-Malware product is Malwarebytes Premium, and their free version

is still the best malware removal tool that doesn't require expert knowledge to use; if Malwarebytes says something is bad, let it remove it. If it can't remove it, whatever 'it' may be, call me.

And for antivirus, I've been an AVG dealer for years; it's still good protection, but it has become noisy with ad popups, even in the paid version, in recent years, and the default settings need changes to detect 'PUPs' or potentially-unwanted programs, otherwise known as toolbars and adware. Call me for alternatives; I have Avast available with cloud monitoring now, and will likely add an alternative product soon–stay tuned. (Disclosure: AVG is now owned by Avast.)

Windows and Microsoft Office

By now, all Windows XP computers should be either gone, or disconnected from the internet and blocked from all online access–Microsoft's security patches ended for XP in April 2014. Chrome and Internet Explorer running on XP are no longer updated, and not safe. The encryption support in those versions of Windows and their embedded Internet Explorers is old, and should never be used for any web site involving a purchase or a log-in.

Office 2003 is also obsolete. If you're using it for spreadsheets, OK, but Outlook 2003 is no longer safe, and it will result in infected computers. Security updates stopped April 2014.

Windows 8.0 machines should all be updated to either Windows 8.1 or Windows 10 by now. Security support ended for the original Windows 8 in January of 2016.

And these products are coming up on the end of security patching as well; it's time to plan the replacement of this software:
Windows Vista, patches end April 11th, 2017.
Office 2007, especially Outlook 2007, security patches end October 10th, 2017.

Windows 7, if up-to-date, is still very good; security updates will run until January 2020. **Important note for Windows 7:** Check the update history–there's a link in the left column of the Windows Updates screen. Windows 7 update has been broken for several months now on many computers. If nothing has installed in the last 6 weeks, call me; there is finally an official fix from Microsoft. Yes, that's a patch to fix patches.

Sound, Video, and Media

There have been multiple 'best' products through the years in these categories. Assume they're no longer best-of-class, except for these: VLC Player, still free, open source, and multi-platform, for playback of music, video, DVDs, audio CDs, and CDBurnerXP Pro for burning optical disks, including CDs, DVDs, and BluRay. Don't search for these online, use PatchMyPC (above) to add them to your computers.

Calendar

I've updated the calendar of when Microsoft products (and a few other popular products) are no longer updated. It's here:
https://www.pc410.com/calendar/

Finally, this disclaimer will always apply to any old recommendations: Ask me again when you're ready to make a change. The market evolves, companies go bad, and sometimes, they surprise us with a leap-frog jump.

Contact