

The 2020 Ticking Time Bomb: Beating
the Windows 10 Migration Timeline

Abstract

As Windows 7 approaches its end-of-support deadline of 14 January, 2020, most enterprises find that their existing Windows landscape is an assortment of Windows 7, 8 and 10. How does the Windows 7 end of life (EOL) affect enterprises? As with any other unsupported operating system (OS), Microsoft will stop deploying bug-fixes, security patches or any new functionality for Windows 7, making the OS more susceptible to malware attacks and data misuse. This is bad news for more than 43% of enterprises who are still using Windows 7.¹

But what's even worse is that many enterprises are either still in the dark about the development or are not doing anything about it. A recent survey revealed that 17% of IT departments were not aware of end-of-support deadline for Windows 7, while 6%, though aware, had not yet started planning for their migration.² And those enterprises that have started migrating to Windows 10 are discovering that the journey is not without its share of challenges. Business continuity, user experience, compliance, costs, and time and resource requirements are some of the key concerns looming large over the migration. Given the extremely tight timeline, how can enterprises ensure seamless migration to Windows 10, with minimal impact to the business?

The paper explores the current OS landscape among enterprises, typical challenges involved in migrating to Windows 10, and the best practices enterprises should adopt for a cheaper, smoother, faster transition within a compressed timeline.





Typical enterprise Windows landscape: A mixed bag of operating systems

Most large enterprises that operate on a Microsoft technology stack have a mixed environment today. By the time Windows 7 hits EOL, it will be powering almost 38% of all Windows PCs, while Windows 10 would account for 56%.³ In addition to Windows 8.1, about 14% of businesses are still using Windows XP. That's not all. Within the Windows 10 environment, multiple OS versions crowd the space. The latest update to Windows 10 version 1809 was revised in early November 2018 and will no longer be supported after May 2021.

Microsoft releases cumulative feature updates twice a year for Windows 10 – in March and September. The feature updates that release in September will get 30 months of free support from their original release date for Windows 10 Enterprise and 18 months for Windows Pro. On the other hand, those released in March will only get 18 months of support for both Enterprise and Pro. Microsoft is optimistic that these timelines will allow IT departments to test and deploy updates as per schedule.

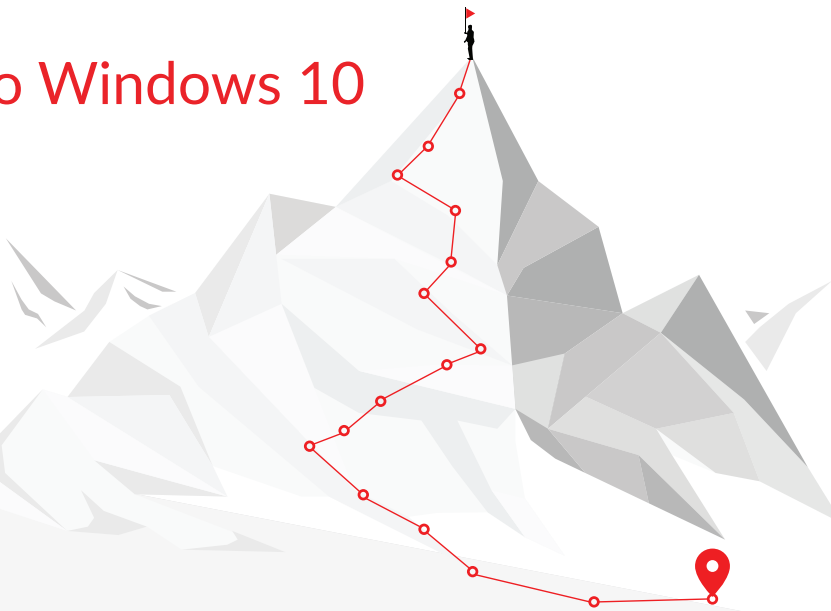
The extended support cut-off dates for Windows are as follows:

- Windows 7 Service Pack 1: 14 January, 2020
- Windows 8.1: 10 January, 2023

Clearly, migrating to Windows 10 is a smart option for enterprises looking to keep security vulnerabilities at bay. Launched in 2015, Windows 10 adoption should have been in its hottest phase by now, as large enterprises typically wait 18-24 months after a major OS rollout before they begin implementation. Though the pace is picking up now, several enterprises have their work cut out for them when it comes to Windows 10 migration. What's holding them back?

Challenges on the road to Windows 10

Irrespective of whether you are just beginning the journey or are amid transition to Windows 10, hitting roadblocks is not uncommon. Migrating devices and users requires exhaustive and careful planning, given the multiple devices and varied versions that need to be migrated. Some of the key challenges when migrating to Windows 10 include :



01

Ensuring hardware and application compatibility

This is the biggest challenge, cited by over 36% of organizations who are in the midst of migration.⁴ According to Microsoft, application compatibility will not suffer during the migration from Windows 7 to 10. But this is not a guarantee. You will still need to go through the process of validating compatibility to ensure uninterrupted user experience (UX). Automated tools, expertise and effort are critical to ensuring this. Hardware compatibility also needs to be checked to enable the new features that Windows 10 offers such as credential guard, device guard, Windows hello and touch enablement. Moreover, as Windows 10 is supported on a device only across the device lifecycle, enterprises must be aware of the support roadmap offered by their hardware vendors. This is important as vendors can stop releasing drivers for the devices after a contractually predetermined amount of time. Besides laptop and desktop compatibility, testing for the compatibility of third-party devices such as printers, scanners, specialized mouse/keyboards is yet another to-do on the migration list.

02

Selecting the security features that matter

While Windows 10 offers several advanced enterprise security features such as Enterprise Data Protection, Microsoft Passport and so on, you must determine which security features matter to your unique IT environment and how you plan to deploy the same. An analysis of the existing products and tools is essential to understand whether these can be leveraged with Windows 10. There may be overlaps, gaps or inconsistencies between the security features of Windows 10 and existing investments, and it's important to figure out a course of action in such cases.

03

Selecting the best-fit deployment model

Microsoft provides a few deployment choices for Windows 10 such as Wipe and Reload, In-place Upgrade, and Provisioning. However, there's no one size fits all deployment choice. A combination of deployment models might be your best bet based on your devices and users' preferences and needs. Zero touch and zero impact deployment models that are standardized across users are likely to yield the best ROI. This mandates a thorough analysis of all devices and user profiles within your enterprise IT environment. 60% of Windows 10 migration projects exceed planned timelines and budgets and receive poor customer satisfaction scores due to the lack of thorough assessment, migration and deployment plans.⁵

04

Managing updates

One of the biggest differences between Windows 10 and previous operating systems is in how updates are handled. Microsoft has moved to an auto-update approach for Windows 10, which means enterprises can no longer pick and choose which updates to install. Updates can be deferred, but not ignored completely. Quality updates or monthly patches that address security and reliability issues, without the addition of any new features, will be delivered monthly. Cumulative updates are available in case enterprises fail to install monthly updates but the option to choose or reject individual security and reliability patches from a cumulative update is no longer available. The way an organization chooses to manage these updates has to be planned and tested before a large-scale migration.

The challenges notwithstanding, failure is not an option when it comes to Windows 10 migration as an efficient, secure, and resilient IT environment is the backbone of business success.

Six steps to success: Completing Windows 10 migration within a compressed timeline

Large scale migrations are hardly ever plug and play exercises – they need diligent planning and methodical execution. The following six proven steps can help you chart your Windows migration roadmap:

1

Build a business case: Securing stakeholder buy-in is the first and the most critical aspect of a successful migration. To build a solid business case: calculate the budget, resources, and the timeline, besides assigning ownership for each step of the way, and document the scope for involvement of third parties. Readily available online resources such as the Windows 10 Migration Budget Calculator and Project Plan Template can be of great help here. It's equally important to leverage data from past migrations to ensure nothing is left to chance and that past lessons are used to optimize future migrations. The next step is to mobilize project resources. Mobilization involves creating the right project leadership team (key stakeholders, infrastructure experts, program managers), engineering team (software developers, application packagers, deployment engineers, etc.), and logistics team (logistics coordinators, migration schedulers, liaison officers, and procurement experts).

2

Infrastructure and migration readiness assessment: Start by taking stock of the current state of your desktop management infrastructure, hardware and software inventory, software usage and license information vis-a-vis users, departments, and locations. This stage should involve extensive data gathering and analysis to identify gaps and create the best migration path. Once the data warehouse is built, move on to compatibility assessment of project tools, hardware and applications, to iron out any issues early on. Remember to consider your human resources at this point – measure their readiness to change and adopt the new Windows 10 OS, understand what factors hinder/drive adoption along with users' pain points/experiences from past migrations.

3

Solution design and build: This stage comprises three key components - technology, process, and tools.

- **Technology** Involves design of the end-to-end platform and its technical considerations, deployment platform, and core build/image design.
- **Process:** Includes listing all the steps involved in realizing the vision – project, application, and deployment management, training and communication process, operational support, change management process, etc.
- **Tool:** Involves building on the tool gaps identified in the previous stage (infrastructure assessment) to determine what new tools will be needed for this migration. Once the design is complete, it's time to build the technology, tools, and process components required for the migration.

4

Pilot roll-out: Before full scale migration, especially in the case of large organizations, it is best to conduct a technical pre-pilot, pilot phase, and then a pilot review to test the effectiveness of the earlier stages and re-engineer components that fail to work. The pilot phase is usually done with 50-100 test users or 0.5-1% of the total to-be-migrated user base. Some organizations also do a full business pilot after the smaller pilot to ensure complete migration readiness and minimize last minute surprises.

5

Migration execution: Now is the time to go live – i.e. the time to schedule and deploy your migration to Windows 10, based on the identification of users and assets for individual migration, departmental migration, and location-restricted migration. Be sure to enable real-time readiness tracking, scheduling, dashboards, reporting, deployment automation, automated emailing, and feedback from self-service to ensure this phase progresses smoothly. It is best to undertake iterative deployment in tranches (sequential or parallel) to enable course correction as and when required and ensure uninterrupted business continuity. During the deployment, it is recommended that enterprises' operational support staff track their support tickets and analyze the major issues that arise to identify any potential problems with the migration early on.

6

Post-migration support: Poor user support after migration is completed has led to the failure of many transformation programs and Windows 10 is no different. Effective training, change management, and documentation (forecasted vs. actual budget, timeline reports, resource reports, lessons learnt, etc.) must be a part of the post-migration phase to ensure seamless service delivery handover.

Planning, best practices and automation are key to accelerating migration and ensuring superior user experience

Given the highly compressed time frame for Windows 7 migration and the need to ensure seamless user experience, use of automation tools, processes, assessment frameworks, and proven industrialized and standardized factory-based approaches will be crucial. This is where a Managed Services Provider (MSP) will be able to add value. They can ensure minimal impact to the user experience (for in-office as well as remote workers) and bandwidth and drive zero-touch deployments by controlling most activities from a central command-and-control point. MSPs also bring in experienced Windows 10 consultants to ensure that the solution build and test goes through a robust validation mechanism aligned with organization's requirements.

Migrating to Windows 10 is only half the battle won. With Microsoft announcing its Windows-as-a-Service offering, the next goal for enterprises is to keep their Windows 10 environment evergreen. This means acquiring the capability to manage Feature updates that are released every six months to keep the Windows 10 environment compliant. Four out of 10 enterprises that migrate to Windows 10 are not prepared for Evergreen IT⁶. Here too, the right partner can provide ongoing support in a cost-efficient and scalable manner and also ensure continuous analysis of user, hardware, and application compatibility for compliance and tracking. In essence, an experienced partner can add significant value in three critical areas: simplification of the migration landscape, prioritization of assets to be migrated, and the enablement of one version of truth across the enterprise. The result: faster, safer and cheaper migration.

About Microland's Windows 10 Evergreen Services

Microland delivers end-to-end Microsoft 365 Evergreen Managed Services from its Microland M365 Center of Excellence to keep Windows 10 and O365 installations up-to-date. Microland's collaborative end-to-end migration planning framework and automation led, analytics-driven platform, DigiTAP help enterprises plan, size, schedule, and support migrations, underpinned by a baseline plan. The proprietary Evergreen Cockpit portal provides stakeholders with near real-time visibility into update cycles. Microland enables Windows 10 migration for remote as well as branch office scenarios, and provides staff augmentation services across USA, UK, EMEA, India, and APAC.

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Raj Kumar Thakur is an Associate Vice President at Microland and leads the Digital workplace services. As part of this role, he is responsible for building service capabilities in the areas of digital workplace, cloud-based messaging and collaboration, and NextGen end user support ecosystem. He has over 19 years of experience in the IT Infrastructure Management space and in his previous roles at Microland, he has led the company's ITSM consulting practice with a focus on IT Operation Strategy Consulting, ITIL and ITSM consulting background and has successfully taken many global organizations through their IT service improvement journeys.



Microland accelerates the digital transformation journey for global enterprises enabling them to deliver high-value business outcomes and superior customer experience. Headquartered in Bangalore, India, Microland has more than 4,200 professionals across its offices in Australia, Europe, India, Middle East and North America. Microland partners with global enterprises to help them become more agile and innovative by integrating emerging technologies and applying automation, analytics and predictive intelligence to business processes.

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