



Extending the Life of a Computer, Reformatting

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Many companies are looking for ways to tighten the belt. One of the ways to delay costs in replacing aging computer hardware is by reformatting. This can be accomplished by erasing all data from a computer, and reloading all the software.

From the moment you turn a computer on, it starts accumulating “stuff”. This stuff is everything from the programs you install, to documents you create. However, there is also stuff that comes in the form of program updates, leftover program files, registry data, temporary files, Windows Security Updates (then often updates to updates), etc. Most of the other stuff can be cleaned up by a utility program, but many other areas, such as your computers registry, cannot.

The registry is a database that stores configuration settings and options for running your computer. Not only Windows, but almost all other programs will store data in this database. After a few years and rounds of updates, patches, program installations, etc., the database will become bloated (not to mention other areas of your system). The best way to restore the speed that your computer once had is to reformat.

Reformatting erases all the information on your computer’s hard drive. Afterwards, every software program will need reinstalled and configured. Also, it is very important that all your data is backed up before you format, so you can restore it afterwards (eg. documents, favorites, email, etc.).

We’ve found that by reformatting a machine, significant speed increases are immediately noticeable, and the system runs faster. However, there are many things to take into consideration when deciding upon replacing or reformatting.

Look at the cost of a new system verses reformatting. A good business computer, with a Core 2 Duo processor, Windows Professional operating system, Microsoft Office Small Business, DVD-Burner, plenty of hard drive space, RAM, and a flat panel monitor, will run approx \$1,100. Of that \$1,100, \$400 is made up in software costs.

Ouch, \$400. Once the computer arrives, you’ll still need to transfer your data over to it and get everything setup. You may be able to do that yourself, or you’ll pay an outside IT Service Provider to provide that service. For easy math, we’ll say it costs \$100 for an IT Service Provider to transfer your data from your old computer to the new one, and set everything back up the way it was and get everything how you like it. So you have \$500 in software and labor.

Now we weigh that against erasing the data on your existing computer, reinstalling and getting everything back up and running. That service should be under \$200. To ensure this is a cost effective alternative we need to ensure that your existing computer is fast enough to keep up with



your demands. There are a few key components to look at, which are the Processor, RAM, Age of Computer and Demand.

By reformatting, you're most likely going to be able to get an additional 2-3 years out of the computer. However, this assumes a few things:

- **Processor** – The current system must have a decent processor. If the computer is five years old, and was purchased with the lowest end processor available, it's probably not worth replacing.
- **RAM** – RAM (memory) is typically very inexpensive to upgrade. Your system may be running slow because you don't have enough memory.
- **Age of Computer** – Nothing is going to help a computer that is over six years old, and ideally, the computer should be between 3-5 years old to consider reformatting.
- **Demand** – A lot will depend on the demand of the system, which is dependent on the software installed. For example, QuickBooks Pro 2010 is not going to run well on a system that is five years old, as QuickBooks is a demanding program. However, if you're using basic non-demanding programs such as word processing, spreadsheet, Internet, and email, your demand is very low.

This article was meant to educate the small business owner/manager on some talking points and options when it comes to replacing aging systems. Please talk with your IT Service Provider for pros/cons of replacing or reformatting, as they'll be able to provide you with solid answers to your questions. For example, upgrading to the latest software could help make the user faster and more efficient, saving tenfold and well worth the \$400. This is the type of conversation you can have with your IT Service Provider, which will lead to the most cost effective use of the financial resources of the company.