



AFL Computer Consulting Newsletter

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WINDOWS XP

We have been living with the final release of Windows XP for a few months. Most new systems will be shipping with XP, so if you're after a new system, you can get it that way. But if you're not in the market for a new system, should you upgrade?

We should start by pointing out that there are 2 flavors, Home and Professional. The key differences between the two are:

- Multiprocessor support (PRO has, HOME doesn't).
- File and folder encryption (under NTFS) only exists in the Pro version.
- PRO edition has better mobile support, due to better off-line and mobile networking support. But the Home Edition runs fine on most notebooks.
- The Remote Desktop technology is a great built in feature to access a remote system.

Note that both versions have support for multiple displays. Early on, the Home Edition wasn't going to support multiple displays, but it's now there in both versions.

For many home users, the home edition is just fine, and is substantially cheaper (\$99 upgrade vs. \$199 for the Pro version).

One of the most controversial aspects of Windows XP has been product activation. Product activation is Microsoft's attempt at preventing casual piracy. The emphasis here is on the word "casual". Microsoft reps have acknowledged that dedicated hackers will find workarounds and hacks to activation, but it's really there to prevent the vast majority of users from installing multiple copies of the operating system on different systems. Most of the fervent denunciations of activation

have come from technology enthusiasts who constantly tweak and upgrade their systems. The incarnation of XP activation that actually shipped was significantly less stringent than originally conceived.

If you buy a PC from a major OEM, such as Dell, Gateway, HP, or others, you probably won't have to deal with activation at all.

Other than that, many of the enhancements in the software focus on the user interface.

Actual experiences have shown:

Windows XP doesn't play nice with older Pentium III-based notebooks, according to a posting on Microsoft's support site. Battery life on systems running Windows XP, a Pentium III "Tualatin" processor and the Intel 440MX chipset will be less than expected. More importantly, when the internal modem is used, the system may hang.

Some of the 2D effects can cause a performance penalty on slower systems and older graphic cards. These items should be disabled.

The Home version will simply not work in an office environment with NetWare, NT, Samba, or windows 2000 servers. User downtime and loss of information are hidden costs of migration that companies pay every time Microsoft releases a windows upgrade. There are many devices for which XP drivers do not yet exist. That will be a problem for some people. Some older applications will have problems working under XP. You need to have at least 256K ram to run.

If you have fairly recent hardware (but not too recent), and you're running 98, then it's probably a good step. The additional stability and features make for a useful upgrade. How-

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INVESTIGATING CREDIT HISTORY

Business Credit USA

www.businesscreditusa.com

\$3 per report

Dun & Bradstreet

www.dnb.com

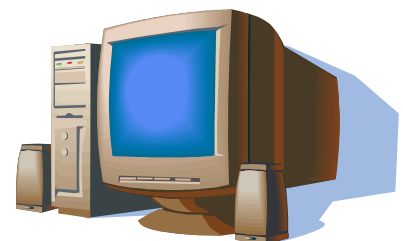
\$25 - \$112 per Report depending on information requesting

Better Business Bureau

www.bbb.org

Remember that you shouldn't rule out a client just because you find an unresolved complaint. Keep it in mind if your work with the company forces you to deal with a similar issue.

(information from techrepublic.com)





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ever, there is that activation step that you'll need to take, so you'll have to make your own personal judgment as to whether it's worth it.

There is a free Upgrade Advisor application that will check to see if your system can be upgraded to XP Professional. The software runs a version of the actual XP install program and checks for incompatibilities. It then returns a sometimes long list of them. You get to decide which apps and devices need updating to run under the new OS and which you are willing to do without.

Much of the industry is hoping that the launch of XP will generate new sales of hardware, be they new system or upgrades. That may or may not be true, but what is true is that XP does appear to be a significant step forward, particularly if you're running 98 or ME. If you're a 2000 user, it's not as major a step, unless you want the additional features or better game compatibility.

USE PASSWORDS THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO CRACK

A good corporate password policy should include these rules at the minimum.

Do not use real words as passwords. Most password cracking programs contain large lists of words and word endings.

Use non-alphanumeric characters like "!" and "&" sprinkled throughout the password.

Set passwords to expire after a period of time no longer than 6 months.

Make sure **ALL** accounts on your server are required to use a password (no "blank" passwords). Such passwords should be at least 7 characters long.

Because of a quirk in the way Windows NT and 2000 store their passwords, it is best to use 7 character or 14 character passwords. In any case, passwords should never be less than seven characters long.

STRONG PASSWORDS

Hip0chondr1ac!
 !F0rty440years
 sch!x0phren!c2

WEAK PASSWORDS

spot
 mypassword
 daisy