

Saving IT Money in Tough Times

By Ben Delaney, CEO, ReliaTech

In this economic climate, every business manager is looking for ways to cut costs. Your Information Technology (IT) strategy is a good place to look for substantial savings.

Putting off the purchase of new computers may be a wise decision now. But business demands on computing don't go away in hard times – on the contrary, making your business more efficient demands effective IT. How do you balance these seemingly contradictory requirements?

At ReliaTech, we have found that a program of scheduled maintenance, what we call Managed Service, combined with a prudent upgrade strategy, can extend the useful life of your computers for as much as 3-5 years. Here's how.

First, avoid problems

Like your car, your computer is less likely to cause you problems if you give it some love and attention. A small maintenance investment will go a long way toward extending your computer's useful life.

Windows' performance deteriorates over time. Its not good at cleaning up after itself – old, unused files clutter your hard disk, and programs you never use still may be running. The Registry – a set of large files that store Windows' settings -- become bloated. Over time, your hard disk becomes fragmented, storing files in many small pieces, and increasing the time it takes to boot up and open files.

Periodic attention can find and eliminate these problems before they slow you down. We visit our clients' offices on a schedule to perform preventative maintenance and to fix problems, often before the user notices them. We check for updates and do virus and malware scans. This inexpensive process keeps computers humming along, and reduces expensive down time and hardware replacements.

Don't replace, repair

Do you really need a new PC when old faithful lets you down? If your current computer is less than five years old, the answer is quite likely, no. Modern PCs are designed as collections of modular sub-systems. In most cases, when your computer crashes or won't start, a single component is to blame. A new disk drive or power supply can often solve the problem and get you back to work. Either of those components will cost less than \$100, installed. Other components, such as your network adapter, CMOS battery, or monitor cable are even less expensive to replace.

Don't replace, ask why

When someone brings a computer into our shop complaining that it is getting slower, there are a few questions we always ask.

First: do you have enough memory? Computer memory (RAM) is inexpensive, and having enough enables your system to run much more efficiently. For Windows XP we recommend 1 GB, for Vista, at least 2 GB.

Second: Do you have a spyware or virus infection? Modern viruses and other malware don't always crash your system. Some run in the background, and perform a variety of obnoxious tasks. Keeping your anti-virus up to date, and scanning for infections frequently are important maintenance items.

Third, How is your hard disk? Hard disks become fragmented over time and get clogged up with unneeded files. Windows offers two utility programs to deal with these issues: Dick Cleanup, and Disk Defragmenter. They should both be run quarterly for best performance.

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2300 el Portal Drive, Suite G
San Pablo, CA 94806
510 236-7000 | www.ReliaTech.org

Those are a few simple and inexpensive ways to prolong the life of your computer and avoid the cost of replacing it. Any computer repair shop can do these things, or, If you're technically proficient, you can do them yourself. The important thing to remember is this – an aging or dead computer can often be restored to its youthful vigor.

Ben Delaney is CEO of ReliaTech, a leading refurbisher and service provider in the San Francisco Bay Area. ReliaTech is the non-profit social enterprise of the Stride Center.