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GN GUIDELINES NO.240

ANOTHER MITEK ADVANTAGE – JULY 2017

By David Schroder, Equipment Mechanical Engineer

Windows – the soul of your machine PC

Forget the hardware. Forget the programs. At the soul of every PC is its operating system. The operating system (OS) on a PC controls the hardware, the CPU, the hard drive, the screen and keyboard. It is also the link through which every other piece of software is accessed, used and through which that software interacts with the world.

As you might imagine, the operating system is critically important to the PC and therefore managing the operating systems on PCs around a factory network is equally important to ensure the ongoing serviceability of machines.

What has all this got to do with the machinery in a truss plant, I hear you ask? Operating systems don't last forever. At the end of the OS life cycle the supplier stops supporting the product and updates are no longer made. In most cases, running an older OS on a PC is not a death sentence. Machine PCs in particular could keep running for years beyond the service life of their OS.

However, allowing an OS to go out of support should be a deliberate decision rather than an act of omission. There are risks that can increase over time and must be managed.

SECURITY UPDATES

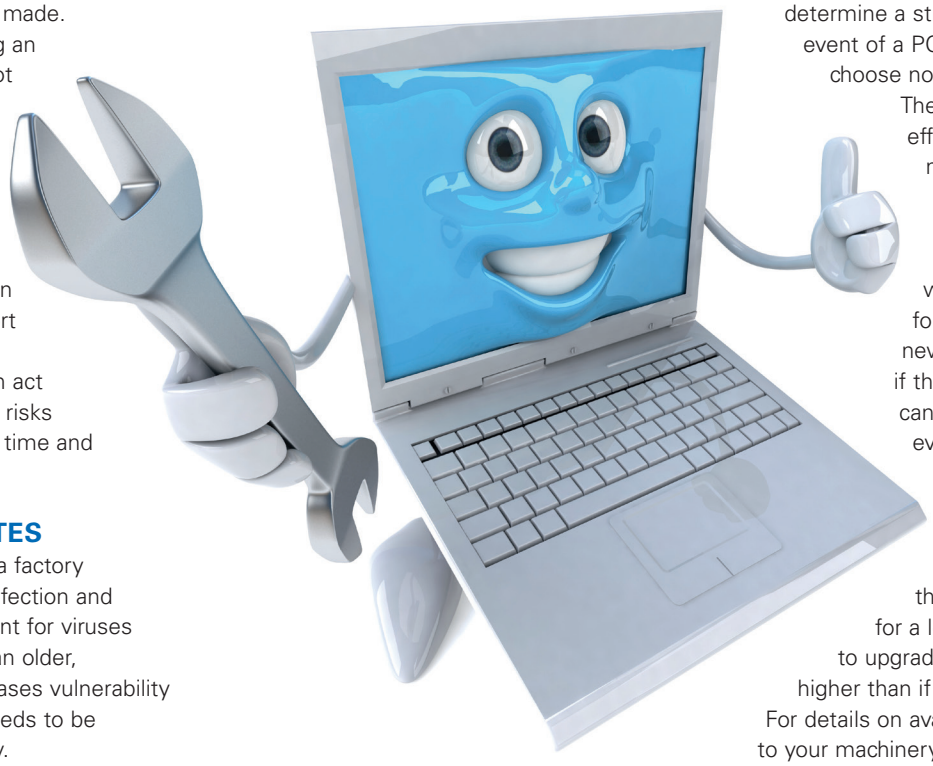
Any PC connected to a factory network is at risk of infection and is a potential entry point for viruses and worms. Running an older, unsupported OS increases vulnerability of the network and needs to be managed appropriately.

PROGRAM UPDATES ARE NO LONGER WRITTEN FOR OLDER OS

The software running the machine is often the only software used on that PC and if the software operates the machine sufficiently then the machine may fly under the radar until the hardware fails. Replacement hardware may not be available and this leads to down time.

NEWER OS MAKES BETTER USE OF THE CURRENT HARDWARE TECHNOLOGY

Speed and operability improvements may be available and these may give a productivity payback on any outlay required for the upgrade. An upgraded PC may also be able to be used to multitask with factory management software such as OptiFlow.



The key to these problems is to have a plan. You can choose to do nothing, but the catch to handling the problem this way is that once the hardware and OS are out of date, breakdowns are often harder to manage. It's usually a much more expensive repair as the entire PC needs replacement and it is often slow to resolve due to lead time on parts and set-up time required to build the new PC.

For example, if the touchscreen on the PC dies and needs replacement, the new screen will likely not come with a set of drivers for older OSs. The entire PC will need to be replaced because a single component died. And the machine is down for the entire time it takes to source the parts and assemble the PC and software.

If you choose this method, know your options, investigate what is available and determine a strategy of upgrading in the event of a PC breakdown, even if you choose not to upgrade immediately.

The other option is to make an effort to future-proof the machine. The PC and OS can be updated on a planned time frame. The machine can keep running while preparations are made for the changeover to the new one, and what's more, if the old PC is kept safe, it can be used as a backup if ever the new PC does fail.

The choice ends up being a question of spending the money on an upgrade now or later – however, if the machine is out of action for a long period of time the cost to upgrade later may be significantly higher than if you plan it ahead of time.

For details on available updates, speak to your machinery supplier. T

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