

WHITE PAPER

Not Just Another Windows EOL White Paper



1.800.800.0014
www.connection.com

Let's explore why you need to act immediately, and how you can develop and implement a solution.

Executive Summary

Every Microsoft Windows Server Operating System (OS) has a life expectancy. As an IT administrator, you are aware that from the moment you install the operating system, you are starting the clock toward the end of its lifecycle. Windows 2008, 2008 R2, and 2012 are no different.

Despite knowing that an operating system will eventually reach retirement, it can be difficult to plan, or even acknowledge, that one day you may find yourself running an unsupported OS.

If you're faced with this situation, you're not alone. A quick search of "Microsoft End of Life" (EOL) returns numerous articles, such as this one, highlighting that many companies are running outdated versions of Windows Server.

Let's explore why you need to act immediately, and how you can develop and implement a solution.

January 14, 2020 Has Passed; Is It Too Late to Prepare?

Although this date has come and gone, it's not time to beat yourself up over lack of planning. Running an unsupported OS does not make you the bad guy. The "bad guys" are the ones who will use the knowledge of your increased security risk to drive change in your organization.

Despite the past EOL date, numerous articles have provided even more reasons to change. It's not too late to move away from an unsupported OS. But, it's important to understand that every day increases the complexity of the upgrade/migration.

What You Don't Want to Know but Need to Know

Some companies find themselves in this position due to lack of budget, change in IT personnel, or delayed or lack of upgrade options. However, you're here now, so you need to understand that an EOL OS has the following implications:

- Security: There will be no access to critical security updates.
- Compliance: Regulatory compliance standards may no longer be met.
- Hardware: Server vendors will no longer include an unsupported OS on new product releases.
- Software: Core applications vendors will stop supporting software on an older OS.
- Support: The ability to receive support from hardware and software vendors will cease.

While these things are hard to accept, they can and should be used to present a business case to upgrade to a supported Windows Server OS. The severity of running an unsupported OS can help you gain executive and business support to bring about change.

Finding the Path that Makes the Most Sense

Avoid searching online for a solution that fits your environment. There is no one size fits all solution for upgrading /migrating from an unsupported Windows OS. There are also many articles written by those who have never performed these updates and migrations in production IT environments, and merely provide suggestions.

Connection's proven methodology will allow you to follow a structured path and proactively identify your activities and risks during each phase.

You need to know what your business ramifications will be, how they will impact your current operations internally, and externally.

Assess

You must first understand your environment, in terms of technology and business requirements.

- Identify your key stakeholders. This is a step that many people forget. It's not all up to the IT department.
- Define business requirements, identify the project scope, and discover any and all impacts to your business, created by the Windows Server OS EOL issue.
- Review your documentation and run collection tools to collect inventory and performance information. This will provide insight into your current state and can be used to help plan your future state.

You need to know what your business ramifications will be, how they will impact your current operations internally, and externally. Once completed, you can obtain an in-depth understanding of your environment. This will be critical to define the scope of your project. Be sure to update your documentation, perform a fresh inventory, and map out system dependencies before you research potential upgrade paths.

Once you determine the impacts, you need to assign a risk value and prioritize them in the order they need to be fixed, from most important to least important. You will then need to present this to your business leadership and get approval. This will ensure you get the required time and resources. As always, be vigilant in your planning. You need to address systems that are facing immediate risk, but do not forget the systems that will impact your business over the long term. Any systems not fixed are a security risk to your environment.

This sounds simple, but it can be quite challenging. It is required, however, to establish a good foundation for the project. Be aware that many enterprises will fail to plan for Windows EOL, and it will severely impact their operations.

Lastly, you need to perform an inventory of your workloads and determine a migration path.

Research Your Options

After you have assessed your environment and identified your business requirements, it's time to evaluate your options. In many cases, there will be more than one way to approach any given workload. Some apps could be upgraded, some could go to a SaaS offering, while others could be re-platformed. You will need to weigh the costs and benefits of each scenario.

Compare various models and strategies and begin to group applications together, either by dependency or by platform type. Group the workloads and applications in batches, based on the most appropriate strategy.

By the end of this phase, it should start to become clear which methods of transformation will work in your environment and what your desired state will look like.

Plan Your Strategy

Relevant data and the time to analyze it are critical to project success. They are also critical components to planning your strategy. We recommend that you document your high-level design and include information, such as priorities and overall workload scenario goals. This could be something general, like this workload needs to move to the cloud with DR or this is a low priority workload that could be addressed as time allows.

You should also develop a low-level design. This will include specific details on each workload, such as infrastructure architecture, cloud models, software versions and licensing.

It's important to stay agile during this process, so you can incorporate new information into the design as you discover additional data points or system limitations. You want to discover any show-stopper problems now, so you can correct them before you begin the migration.

Ultimately, by the end of the design phase, all key stakeholders should agree with the plan before moving onto the implementation stage.

Migrate (Execute Your Plan)

Ideally, you will start with a Proof Of Concept (POC). The POC will validate your solution will function correctly. Once you confirm the solution is viable, you can move into a pilot phase and bring real world users into the environment to validate functionality. This will confirm the application will function with acceptable performance and usability.

This is a great time to assess what end user training materials need to be developed. You can also identify workflow optimizations, during the pilot, that may need to be incorporated into business operations:

- Production rollout
- Requirement validation
- Old system decommissioning
- Business disruption
- Success criteria

Determine the appropriate upgrade/migration process that meets your business requirements. Some workloads can remain operating after an upgrade to the latest version of Windows. Other workloads may require re-platforming. Develop a migration plan with validation and failback procedures.

Ongoing Maintenance

You've done all the work and you have updated your environment. Time to pat yourself on the back and relax. Unfortunately, the frequency with which applications and operating systems are released can seem relentless.

It's easy to stick your head in the sand and wait until a big end of life comes along, before doing anything. Ultimately, though, that just pushes today's problem into tomorrow. Instead it is recommended that you integrate EOL management into your regular work cadence.

For starters:

- Evaluate your workloads and assets on a regular basis.
- Know EOL dates and proactively work towards them.
- Prioritize mission critical workloads to ensure business continuity.
- Implement software and hardware asset management tools.

Your primary goal with OS and application EOL is to ensure that there's no loss of productivity from unsupported or obsolete hardware, software, or firmware.

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Conclusion

The fact that you've been able to run your organization with an aging OS for so long deserves credit. Unknowingly, you've probably portrayed a picture that everything runs smoothly. You may have even gone so far as to create a culture that if IT's not broken, then don't fix IT. Worse yet, your organization may view IT as a one-time investment, instead of something that requires ongoing care and maintenance.

Use this Windows EOL as an opportunity to transform your IT. View this as a positive change—one that can bring vast improvements and efficiency to critical workloads. Resist treating this transformation as a long list of painful tasks. This transformation seems like a lot of work and it is. If you arrived here looking for validation about whether to proceed with these tasks or seek help, we can help. We offer custom services that can do all the work from start to finish. Or if you prefer, we are happy to take on the more complex parts of the project and allow you to get a good night's sleep. Connection's services can even help assess your environment, evaluate solutions, and align core workloads so you can migrate/upgrade.

For more information, contact a Connection Windows Server expert today!

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1.800.800.0014	1.800.369.1047	1.800.800.0019

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