

# Microsoft Set to Drop Support for Windows 95 and Windows NT

## Workstation 4

By Joshua Feinberg

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Microsoft Set to Drop Support for Windows 95 and Windows NT Workstation 4

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Are you planning on keeping your existing PC hardware and current Microsoft Windows version "forever"? If so, don't count on Microsoft's ongoing support.

While it may be old news to corporate IS managers, small businesses are just waking up to a harsh reality in the apparently one-horse-town world of operating systems. Microsoft is once again dangling the veiled threat of limited and withdrawn support to "encourage" (i.e. intimidate) customers into moving to either the Microsoft Windows 2000 or the soon-to-be-released Microsoft Windows XP OS platform.

## Handwriting on the Wall with Earlier MCP Announcements

The alarming news should come as no surprise to Microsoft Certified Professionals, such as MCPs and MCSEs.

Since early 2000, Microsoft Certified Professionals have been ordered repeatedly to upgrade their credentials to Microsoft Windows 2000 or risk having the "impressive" letters following their name repossessed by December 31, 2001.

## Service Pack 7 Scrapped Based on "Customer Feedback"

Although Microsoft had been promising a successor to Service Pack 6a, released in late 1999, protracted delays made Service Pack 7 seem increasingly unlikely. In April, Microsoft Product Support Services (PSS) removed any ambiguities from the equation. Microsoft has begun to not so subtly "pull the plug" on the Microsoft Windows NT 4 family, as Service Pack 7 will never see the light of day.

Tip: A service pack is Microsoft's way of making interim changes to an OS, in between major Windows version updates. For example, with Microsoft Windows NT 4, through six service packs, is today a very different OS than the one Microsoft first released in 1996.

First announced several weeks ago, but largely off the radar screen of small businesses, Microsoft's back pedaling here is especially troubling.

For starters, the "List of Available Windows NT 4.0 Service Packs" on the Microsoft PSS web site (<http://support.microsoft.com/support/servicepacks/WinNT/4.0/>) shows Service Pack 7 side-by-side with previous releases. This misleading display makes Service Pack 7 look almost real, until you click the associated hyperlink.

But make no mistake. According to the posted update from Microsoft, Service Pack 7 is not being released "based on customer feedback".

While you still could fix many of the post Service Pack 6a security and reliability problems through existing hot fixes, gathering and applying the potentially dozens of required hot fixes can be a time-consuming, availability destroying activity that's burdened with substantial risk and the need for a reboot after each hot fix is applied. Obviously, the support costs for a small business taking this route can be substantial.

According to the posted update on Service Pack 7, Microsoft's planned olive branch is a "comprehensive rollup of all Windows NT 4.0 security vulnerabilities as a single package in Q3 2001". However, with Microsoft Windows XP shipping by then, who knows if this "single package" is anything but a mere "classic-Microsoft" stalling tactic or marketing-induced "smoke and mirrors".

#### Windows 95 Support To Be Discontinued By Year End

In related news, a similar bulletin on the Microsoft PSS web site (<http://support.microsoft.com/directory/discontinue.asp?sd=gn>) shows that Microsoft Windows 95 will reach the end of its "product lifecycle" on December 31, 2001. Our take: Microsoft "needs" you to upgrade to a newer OS to help its 2002 revenue numbers.

What does this mean to small businesses? Neither you nor your computer consultant will be able to call Microsoft with Microsoft Windows 95 technical support questions by the end of this year.

Like the Service Pack 7 shock, the "discontinuance" of Microsoft's support for Microsoft Windows 95 has been known for quite some time. However, small businesses without a full-time IS staff have likely missed this incredibly important issue. While any PC that you purchased new after mid 1998 would likely have at least Microsoft Windows 98 installed, you should prepare to be stranded with any of your older PCs that are still running Microsoft Windows 95.

#### Windows NT Workstation 4 and Windows 98 to be Dropped in June 2003

On a similar note, Microsoft PSS will drop support of Windows NT Workstation 4 and Windows 98 just 18 months later on June 30, 2003.

Those of you who've seen the major PC OEMs, such as Compaq, Dell, and Gateway, running advertisements heralding we "recommend Microsoft Windows 2000 Professional for business" may not be at all surprised at this apparent ultimatum.

But to this day, you still can purchase a new PC with Microsoft Windows 98 Second Edition and, up until just a few months ago, you could still buy a new PC with Microsoft Windows NT Workstation 4.

Again, how will this impact small businesses? For one, in just two short years, Microsoft will not be providing technical support for your PCs running anything but Microsoft Windows 2000 or Microsoft Windows XP.

### The Bottom Line

As always, your most cost effective way to ease into gradually upgrading your version of Windows is by attrition. So on any new PC purchases, be sure to upgrade your OS at the time of purchase to one of the newer business-oriented versions of Windows. For around \$100 U.S. over the consumer offerings (Microsoft Windows 98 SE or Microsoft Windows ME), the price is right --- at least until you consider the accompanying computer support costs of an OS migration.

However, and this is a huge caveat, be sure your peripherals and industry specific software are compatible with your new planned OS before you leap under duress.

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