How Often Should I Upgrade My Office Computers?

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Ask most IT professionals how long to keep computers in service and they'll typically suggest maintaining a three- to five-year upgrade cycle. This recommendation draws on a wide range of criteria, including how well your hardware measures up to current and future needs, and how much you have to spend to keep older technology running. You'll find it easier— as well as less expensive — to plan timely upgrades you can budget for effectively.

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Operating System Requirements

If your computers still run the operating system they came with, don't hold off any longer on migrating to a newer OS. Here's why: computers lose compatibility with new operating systems when they no longer meet the specs that Microsoft® or Apple® set for Windows® or OS X. A processor that's too slow, a motherboard that can't hold enough RAM chips or other CPU shortcomings can put your hardware below the upgrade cutoff.

Software Necessities

The software that powers your business can also dictate when you need new computers. If you use specialized applications to design parts, prepare architectural plans, create advertising and marketing materials, or manipulate and edit video or audio, you need specific hardware configurations to support new software versions. As long as your current applications keep pace with the demands of your business, you may be able to hold off on new computer hardware. When you need to upgrade your core software, your computers must be able to keep pace with your defining applications. If you need to triage your hardware requirements, choose top-of-the-line systems for employees who use power-hungry software and middle-of-the-road configurations for workers with less hefty requirements.

Support Costs

After basic and extended warranty periods end, computer support costs come out of your pocket. Older computers typically cost more to run – and require more support than newer hardware. Keyboards and pointing devices are usually the first to wear out. Hard drives fail and video cards become unreliable with age. Even when aging devices stay operational, they can compromise productivity, slowing your overall workflow. Some older systems remain upgradable, accepting more RAM and faster drive technologies, such as solid-

state drives. However, when the costs of upgrades begin to approach or even exceed the price of replacing the entire system, you've reached the point when new hardware is required.

Server and Infrastructure Needs

Your server typically ages faster than the rest of your systems, because it sees more use than your other IT hardware. As it ages, it becomes noisier, lags behind the responsiveness of newer hardware and can dramatically decrease productivity. Don't let the need to be prudent with your finances limit your ability to conduct business. Planned upgrades that keep pace with your company's projected capacity and workflow keep your business on track, without the additional expense of recovering from an IT disaster.