

Windows 10 End of Support: Weighing Third-Party Options

TechRounder PDF Edition

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What happened

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Microsoft has announced that Windows 10 will reach its end of life in October 2025, leaving many businesses facing the challenge of upgrading their systems or finding alternative support options. While Microsoft offers extended support for Windows 10, some companies are considering third-party solutions to maintain security and defer costly upgrades.

The Challenges of Upgrading

Hardware Compatibility

Many older PCs may not meet the minimum system requirements for Windows 11, making the upgrade process difficult for some businesses.

Software Compatibility

Some software or applications may not be compatible with Windows 11, forcing users to stick with Windows 10 or find alternatives.

Point-of-Sale (POS) Terminals

Upgrading POS terminals running Windows 10 can be particularly challenging for IT professionals in the retail and hospitality sectors.

Microsoft's Extended Security Updates

Microsoft offers extended support for Windows 10 to commercial customers and small businesses:

- Year 1: \$61 per device
- Year 2: \$122 per device
- Year 3: \$244 per device

Cloud-based update management users enjoy cost savings:

- Year 1: \$45 per user with up to five devices

Educational institutions receive a significant discount:

- Total of \$7 over the maximum of three years

The Extended Security Updates provide monthly critical and important security updates but do not include access to new features and are limited to three years.

Third-Party Support: Opatch

Acros, a Slovenian company, offers an alternative to Microsoft's extended support through its Opatch brand:

- Up to five years of support at a lower cost than Microsoft
- Opatch Enterprise (medium and large organizations): 35 per device per year, excluding tax
- Opatch Pro (small businesses and individuals): 25 plus tax per device per year

Opatch uses "micro-patches" to address critical vulnerabilities, claiming faster deployment and lower potential for system instability. The company may also offer fixes for vulnerabilities left unpatched by Microsoft and provide patches for non-Microsoft products.

Assessing the Risk-Reward Balance

Before opting for third-party support, companies should conduct a thorough risk-reward analysis to determine if the cost savings are worth the potential risks:

1. Evaluate the cost of purchasing extended support from Microsoft versus the cost of third-party solutions like Opatch.
2. Consider the potential challenges of relying on a third party for security patches, as it introduces a layer of dependency beyond Microsoft's established ecosystem.
3. Assess the long-term impact of delaying an upgrade, as upgrading from one version to the next is generally simpler than skipping multiple versions.

While third-party support can be an attractive option for businesses looking to defer costly upgrades, it is essential to carefully weigh the risks and rewards before making a decision. Ultimately, companies must strike a balance between maintaining security, managing costs, and ensuring compatibility with their existing systems and software.