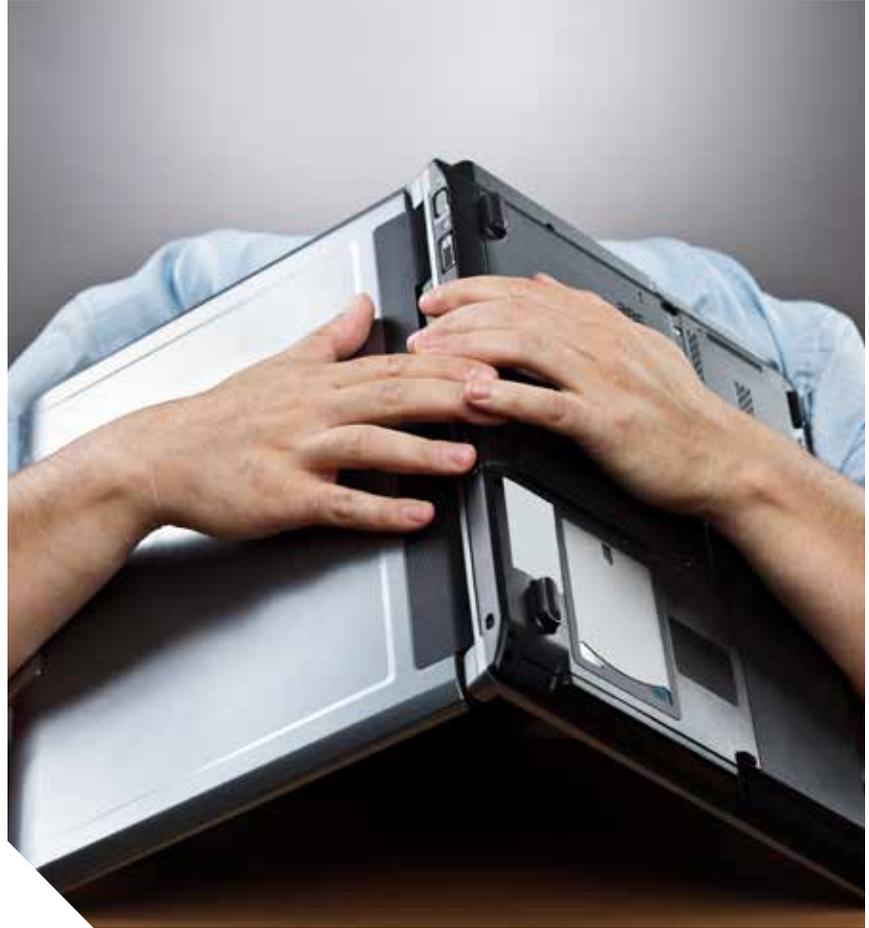# WHY YOU NEED A COMPUTER REPLACEMENT SCHEDULE

BY HEATHER REMER, CEO, COMPUTERCARE, LLC

Surprise expenses for any business owner are the worst. Computer replacement costs often fall into this category of "surprise expense." But, they don't need to, and adopting a more strategic approach to technology replacement can save a lot of headache down the road and can help you make every IT dollar you have really count.

Ultimately, all computers will fail. All technology has a set lifecycle. Planning for this "end of life" is the best approach to minimize the damage from failures. Many companies do factor in the cost of repair but fail to plan for replacement, and as you will see, this often results in much greater expenses over the long term.

The standard recommendation for a PC or server replacement is three to five years. Some systems last longer and others shorter, depending on how the system is used. Often, as computers age, we acclimate to the declining performance and don't realize how much slower our computers have become or how much disruption they are actually causing — all the more reason for business owners to take a step back and look at their technology on a regular basis.

Consider this. A Techaisle study from 2014 revealed that businesses are spending on average $427 per PC for those older than four years. For a company of 20, that works out to $8,540 just in repair costs. This does not include other maintenance costs like patching and software upgrades, maintaining antivirus software, etc. This means that after four years of age, repair costs will come close to or even exceed the costs of purchasing a new machine. Consider also the costs of lost productivity while these systems are being repaired, which according to the same study average 42 hours per year per computer, and the reasons for timely replacement become even more evident.

If that wasn't enough, older machines hinder productivity while in use due to difficulty running multiple applications at once as well as establishing and maintaining remote connections. They also consume more energy and have shorter battery life. Newer systems add minutes back throughout your day and cut costs in areas like these that you might not be considering.

It makes sense to want to maintain the equipment you already have, but when it comes to technology, new is often the way to go. And planning out the life of your systems will allow you to replace them strategically before they start to eat at your bottom line.

There are a few different approaches companies can make when planning out their replacement schedules.

1. Time-Driven Policies – A time-driven policy simply replaces PCs on a fixed schedule (usually every three to four years). This has the highest direct capital costs but is usually most appropriate, particularly when considering servers because of the impact of downtime. This also is the easiest approach for budgeting purposes because you can allot the monies well in advance.
2. Performance Drive – Replacing a PC when performance drops below a predetermined level. This is still a bit reactive and, even if taking this approach, allotting money for these replacements is still necessary. This is still much better than waiting till the system breaks.

Replacing systems "as-needed" makes sense only for the very smallest organizations where a high tolerance for downtime exists and the budget is very small.

Things also to consider in setting up your IT replacement plans are not only when the system will be aging out but also whether or not you have any software upgrades that also need to happen. Planning these two upgrades simultaneously can have advantages including minimizing the number of interruptions to your team and also ensuring that your software won't be surpassing your computers and forcing an upgrade down the road due to lack of compliance.

Not sure what to do with your old computers and equipment? Ask your favorite nonprofit if they might benefit from them. Or, pass them on to organizations like the ARC of Alachua County, where those with disabilities will break them down and recycle them and the proceeds go to fund the ARC's beneficial programs.

Still have questions about how much to budget, what type of systems you will want to replace your existing items with, or what to do about your other network devices like your wireless routers and network-attached storage devices? Your IT provider should be able to help with this. Many will sit with you to work up a plan, so if this has not been offered, don't be afraid to ask for it.