



Softwords

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A&L's Head Office: (905) 886-8066
 Oak/Miss/Bramp/Ajax: (416) 520-3238
 Ottawa Office: (613) 737-0677
 Timmins Office: (705) 268-4922
 Windsor Office: (519) 977-6050
 California Office: (760)-723-8121

Web Link Address: www.anl.com

...Contents...



The Future Is Now

Windows XP...Is It The Real McCoy? ...Page 1



The Ever Changing Practice

Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A. ...Page



User's Corner

Backup Considerations ...Page 3



It's Just A Virus

How To Protect Yourself ...Page 4

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 A&L Web site: www.anl.com

The Future Is Now

Windows XP...Is It The Real McCoy?

With much fanfare, Windows XP was officially launched to the awaiting public on October 25, 2001. Not since Windows 95 has there been as much anticipation regarding the introduction of 'new' software. However, as early as September, computer manufacturers were selling Windows XP on products as OEM installations so consumers may have already been using it prior to October 25, 2001. Early indications are that it is as stable as the Windows 2000 operating systems, which is great. However, some early opinions are already coming in. Although most of them are very good, not all are. And the reasons are not all based on the actual program.

The hot topic of discussion revolves around registration and privacy. The reason behind all this registration is to crack down on copyright violations and pirated software. "Product Activation" has already been used in Microsoft Office XP and Visio 2002 programs. As most of us in the industry already know, this was designed to prevent the so-called "casual copying" that violates the licensing agreement. Being in the industry, we are always aware of general licensing agreements. However, the majority of people do not read/understand the licensing agreement. That is quite understandable when you consider the length and complexity of the document. Subsequently, the casual user may from time to time violate the agreement unintentionally, and that adds up to huge revenue losses for Microsoft. However, Microsoft's intent is not to prosecute the casual user but those who are pirating in business and retail environments. But make no mistake; Microsoft wants ALL pirating of their software to stop.

Of course, A&L is testing the Windows XP operating system, but we will reserve judgment until further testing has been completed. This is what the IT world is

saying about Windows XP to date:

The Con

From the time you first boot Windows XP, you will have 30 days to activate it either online or via telephone. The activation is based on a 50-digit installation code that consists of the XP software product ID and a "hardware hash value" (identification of components that make up your computer). Once you activate XP, the idea is that you can't make more than five major changes to the hardware configuration without reactivating. This prevents you from loading the operating system from one computer to another without Microsoft knowing it. For those of you who like to upgrade your hardware on your own, every 120 days the clock is reset and you can make an additional five hardware changes without having to re-register. However, if you replace or reformat the hard drive you must always reactivate.

Passport is required if you want to register your computer. What is Passport? Passport is a web service operated by Microsoft which allows you to sign in to websites and conduct e-commerce transactions. This is a Microsoft operated service which requires the user's email address and password so it can create a "Passport e-commerce account."

Subsequently, any website that participates with Microsoft's Passport program will automatically require that information. Upon creating the Passport profile users may or may not be asked personal questions. Many people are apprehensive about giving out that type of information. If you have entered a Passport account in your system, it will automatically log on to any participating sites that you enter. An advantage is that you do not have to have all these different user names and passwords, which beats having to memorize another PIN or

(Continued on page 3)

The Ever Changing Practice

By Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A.

This is one of a series of articles by Don Price on Practice Management which have been appearing in recent issues of Softwords. Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A., is a Practice Management Consultant based in Ottawa, Ontario. He travels extensively throughout Canada helping physicians and their staff tune up and revitalize their offices through consultations and seminars. In addition, Mr. Price publishes workbooks and two bi-monthly newsletters for physicians and medical office staff. He can be reached at 1-800-458-1900 or fax (888) 339-5975.



How well do you know your patients? We're not talking about their diseases and injuries, or even their names, but about the types of people who make up your practice. Almost every aspect of running your practice will be enhanced by having a good knowledge of who your patients are. If your patients are mostly middle class professionals, your scheduling problems will be very different from those of a colleague whose patients are mostly seniors. If you have a preponderance of young families with babies and school age children, you may find that your time management has to take into account a daily number of lengthy phone calls, which might not be a problem for another doctor whose patient base encompasses many new immigrant patients who prefer to see the doctor rather than make phone calls.

Few general practices today maintain a stable patient demographic base over the long term. The population from which you draw your patients can and probably will change over time, and one day you may become aware that you are seeing more demanding patients than you used to, or have a higher number of patients calling in to ask for prescription refills. Your staff may complain of more no-shows or more walk-ins.

Ignoring the problems in the hopes that they will go away isn't the solution. What has to be done is to analyze what changes have occurred in your patient base over the past few years that may have caused the problems you are now encountering.

For instance, the young couples that used to predominate your practice are growing older, their babies growing into teenagers. The reasons they used to see you - the family planning advice, diaper rashes and ear infections - have now changed to encompass new concerns - sports injuries, teenage depression, aging parents. Five years ago, you may have had more short patient visits to deal with. Today, the number of short visits may have dropped and been replaced with more time consuming ones, even though you are still seeing the same people. Your scheduling has to reflect these changes or you will be left scrambling to keep ahead.

Specialty practices aren't immune to change. Cardiologists and ophthalmologists, for example, have to adjust to an aging population that brings with it additional health problems, both in volume and intensity. New sub-specialties may have to be developed in order to keep up with, for example, a patient base that is maturing and requesting cosmetic surgery from a plastic surgeon.

Changes to your patient base will also affect your time management, in both paperwork and telephone calls. If the number of school age children in your practice has grown, you

will probably be writing more back-to-school notes, doing more camp physicals. As your patient base ages, you may have more referrals and more insurance physicals and medico-legal letters to handle. You may also be providing more uninsured services, not just because your provincial health department has de-listed more services but because your patients are now in an age or socio-economic bracket that wants more of these uninsured services. More uninsured services mean more time spent in explaining your policies to patients and in staff billing hours.

Changes will also happen as your patients get to know you and your staff. If your patients have learnt over time that you will never say 'no' to them, regardless of how limited your time is, the chances are that the number of multi-problem and demanding patients in your practice will grow. As new patients develop confidence in you, you may find that the number of lengthy visits increases because your patients are now bringing problems to you that they may have been too embarrassed or too afraid to discuss when they didn't know you well.

Other changes can occur if industry opens on your doorstep, or a walk-in clinic opens in the next block. You may gain a new type of patient or lose others because of these changes. Short-term changes to demands on your scheduling and time management will crop up seasonally, of course, but you must be prepared for these variations to patient demands and adjust your practice to accommodate them.

No practice will remain stable forever, but it is the wise physician who steps back periodically to assess where and how his/her practice is moving - and moves with it.

*(This article first appeared in **The Practice Manager**, a newsletter published by Don Price & Associates.)*



User's Corner

Windows XP (continued from page 1)

password in this security conscious world of ours. All sites participating in this program will be identified with a "TRUSTe Privacy Program" insignia and a "TRUSTe" trademark. You will be told the following:

- 1) What personally identifiable information is collected
- 2) How the information is used
- 3) With whom the information may be shared
- 4) What choices are available to you regarding the collection, use and distribution of the information
- 5) What kinds of security procedures are in place to protect the loss, misuse or alteration of information under the company's control
- 6) How you can correct any inaccuracies in the information.

Part of accepting the Passport agreement is allowing Microsoft and its business partners to send you e-mail. Do you ever wonder how you start receiving junk mail addressed to you? Or how links to web pages start opening without you prompting? The type of links, applications and inquiries that we make, in most cases without our consent, is possibly profiling us. Or they may simply be doing a mass e-mailing, which would be even worse.

On the program side of things, XP uses an older version of JAVA which happens to be four years old. What is Java and how does it affect you? To keep things simple, what it means is that when using the Internet you may have problems viewing some web sites. To prevent these problems you could download the newest version of Java. However, it is 5MB in size. This may discourage some users from downloading it.

As with all previous new Microsoft operating systems, the hardware specification requirements have increased. This is a given. The more RAM and the faster the processor you have, the better. As with Windows 2000, it takes considerably longer to boot up.

If you buy a new computer and don't use the Internet on Windows XP, I guess it's not a major problem. Neither is most of my comments written in the Con section.

The Pro

First of all, there is a difference between activation and registration. You will need to activate Windows XP one way or another and how that happens depends upon how you buy it. Some computer makers may have already completed the activation for you. If you buy it as a retail upgrade, you'll have to do that yourself. As far as activating it is concerned you don't really have to enter your name or address. And if you want to stay anonymous, you don't even have to register everything.

Compared to Windows 95, 98 and ME, Windows XP is far more stable and reliable. Windows has basically combined the new Windows ME functions with the stability of Windows 2000.

In previous Windows versions an error from one application, depending on the severity, could cause problems in the entire system and crash it. The new process allows for each application to have its own separate memory space, thus protecting it from other applications that have problems. Ctrl-Alt-Del will allow you to close any individual program that is not responding

(continued in the next column)

Backup Is Just Time...

Not Doing It Could Cost You Money!

Back in March we wrote an article regarding Microsoft's backup.exe on Windows ME. Although the information is useful in terms of notifying you what will work with Windows ME, the message this time is the importance of doing a backup and ensuring it is working properly. Since our last newsletter, we have had a number of hardware crashes and virus infections necessitating replacing hardware and formatting hard drives, and then restoring the system from backup. This is when having a recent and working backup becomes critical.

Firstly, backup must be made daily, when changes are made to your system. This includes any entries, whether adding new patients, making changes to patient information, making appointments and of course billing updates. This minimizes lost records and re-entry of information. Secondly, you should have a different backup for each day of the week. If one disk or a backup set is no good, you can then go to the next.

One of the major inconveniences of having out-of-date backups is the jumble of information you may get from your RA. Imagine having just done a backup, and then doing a submission. Two weeks later (or longer) you have to restore from your backup. If you do not put your information back in the order that it was first entered, MOH will have different claim numbers belonging to different patients when compared to what you have just re-entered in addition to getting errors back for claims previously paid. Plus, you may not have the information to re-enter. At this point, the only way to save you from out of sequence information is to use paper records. Computers are supposed to make life easier. As long as you do things properly this will be the case.



Windows XP (continued from previous column)

without adversely affecting the rest of the computer (of course, that's what current Window versions are supposed to do).

Without sounding like a pitchman from Microsoft and without getting into detail, here is a list of other claims made about Windows XP:

- 1) Better reliability (less prone to crashes)
- 2) Better performance (faster from application to application)
- 3) Easier to use
- 4) Easier to get help and support
- 5) New/increased Internet and networking options
- 6) Improved multimedia functions

Overall, the program enhancements are impressive. As with each new version, grandiose claims of 'bigger and better' are part of the routine. So far, it looks to be that way.



It's Just A Virus

The world seems to have been placed on a heightened alert with the events of September 11, 2001. The word 'Security' is now one of the most common words heard and seen on Radio, Television and the Internet. With this in mind the precautions needed to protect your PC from computer viruses have become a prominent topic. The total cycle of a new virus coming on scene, a virus warning and the protection of your computer from the malicious virus has become the norm. However, for those who still have not seen the importance of securing your own PC, the following information may just save you from a potential headache!

Computer viruses can be transferred to an unsuspecting PC through an assortment of formats. Avenues such as e-mail, infected software, diskettes, infected CD-R/RW, computer documents and even Internet web browsing can transport a computer virus to your PC without you even knowing. Sluggish and slow software or operating systems can often be attributed to a computer virus lurking within a computer workstation, unknown to the person using the PC. New computer viruses are showing up on a weekly, and even a daily basis, and they can cause many issues within a PC, too numerous to mention.

If you have anti-virus software remember that an Antivirus program is only as good as its last update. To get complete protection, you must regularly update the virus definition files and the

scanning engine. Prevention is always better than hours of frustration and lost data. Some of the main ways to ensure your PC is protected from malicious computer viruses include the following:

- Refrain from opening e-mail and e-mail attachments from individuals you do not know.
- Do not execute .EXE files directly from your e-mail.
- Look at purchasing an Antivirus software package and have it updated at least on a weekly basis.
- Have diskettes and CD's scanned by virus-scanning software before inserting into your PC.
- Secure your Internet Web browsing.
- Make sure you make a regular backup in case you need to restore data.

Due to the nature of computer viruses, in terms of protecting your PC, nothing can be guaranteed. The individuals who create viruses are people with lots of time on their hands, who look for loopholes in existing operating systems, software, hardware and the Internet that can be exploited to cause grief for the unsuspecting target.

The information provided above will hopefully aid in protecting your PC from unwanted computer viruses that can harm hardware, software and productivity. The bottom line is that if you have a virus, you are no longer in control of your PC. If viruses destroy nothing else, they destroy your confidence in your PC, which is something that is quite valuable.



Season's Greetings & Happy Holidays To All !

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, things seem different. Whether it's our perspective, listlessness or the embracing of life, everyone has been touched one way or another. Living in Canada we view world events through the media using third party eyes. Others may have seen it first hand. News coverage, being what it is, usually shows the tragedies and strife other countries go through. Desensitizing occurs from too much exposure and media coverage, but not on September 11th. Since then, not a day goes by when we should all be thankful for what we have, regardless of our current situation. Please say a prayer for all the children who may have to grow up and live in a world less peaceful. And please say a prayer for all those who may not have enough to eat. For this holiday season please have more patience and tolerance when dealing with others, and at the same time try not to let the little things bother you. And last of all, please pray for peace around the world.

**Do you have a fax number or e-mail address? Please help us keep your records up to date.
If you have either one, please let us know:**

**A&L Computer Software Ltd. (905) 886-8066
175 West Beaver Creek Road, Unit 6 Richmond Hill, Ontario L4B 3M1**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ **Phone:** _____

Fax: _____

E-mail: _____