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ITR Technologies, LLC  
"Serving All Your Computer & Network Business Needs"

# Tech Talk

## Do you have Upgrade Phobia?

— Tom Warfield

**When should you upgrade?** Many people prefer to wait until the last possible minute. As with anything else, there are pros and cons, risks and benefits, to doing an upgrade, whether it be hardware, operating system, or application software. An upgrade always involves change, so it is inevitable that things will be different. Hopefully the change will be for the better!

What are some ways to minimize the risks? And what are some guidelines for knowing when it is the right time?

One common situation, where you might be forced to upgrade both the operating system and software, is when you get new hardware. Often the old software is either incompatible or no longer available. This is perhaps the worst case scenario, since you may be changing all three things at once instead of doing a gradual rollout. On the other hand, it may be more efficient to "bite the bullet" and get everything over with. Plus, getting new hardware provides a convenient platform to test the new software - that is, if you are able to keep the old hardware going at the same time, and do parallel testing.

**If you are in a production critical environment,** it is essential to test every change. Even minor

things like Windows security patches can have unknown consequences and break something. This is one contributing factor to Upgrade Phobia. Another contributor is the learning curve for new functionality and new user interfaces. Controls, keyboard shortcuts, menus, and buttons are moved or altered. Default settings are changed. Your favorite feature is finished. Familiar ways of working have to be re-learned.

For example, the user interface for Microsoft Office was completely redesigned in 2007. Also, the default Office 2007 file format is different, making new files incompatible with older Office versions. A product called "Classic Menu for Office 2007", restores the familiar toolbars and buttons—this might delay or postpone the learning curve, but it costs extra.



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## YuleTube

— Elizabeth Taylor

**On Thanksgiving night** I sat down to watch some TV with my children, and was surprised to see that Christmas specials were already on. I began to think back to all of the great Christmas classics that I loved as a child, and I look forward to watching them with my own kids. Here is a list of the Top Ten Christmas TV Specials of All Time, compiled by Michael Harriot of [www.mymerrychristmas.com](http://www.mymerrychristmas.com):

- |                                      |                                      |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 10. Happy Holidays with Bing & Frank | 5. Frosty the Snowman                |
| 9. Bob Hope's Christmas Specials     | 4. Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire |
| 8. Santa Claus is Coming to Town     | 3. How the Grinch Stole Christmas    |
| 7. Mickey's Christmas Carol          | 2. Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer    |
| 6. The Year Without Santa Claus      | 1. Charlie Brown Christmas           |

While I don't agree with all of his choices, and I haven't even seen all of them, I can't wait to curl up on the couch with my kids and a giant bowl of popcorn, and watch these Christmas classics.

*Hoping you and yours have a magical holiday season!*



# Upgrade Phobia

(Continued from page 1)

With so many potential problems that can happen when you upgrade, why would anyone ever do it? There are three main reasons to go through with an upgrade:

- 1. Expiration of support.** No company can be expected to support an old product forever. Companies want to use new technology, create new products, and get new customers (and as a consequence, make more money). Most products have an “end-of-life” strategy, whereby the product will not be sold or supported after a given date. Although a product may continue to work just fine after ten years in service, the original developers of that product have almost certainly moved on several times since the product was released. Even if you could find them, they aren’t likely to remember much about something they worked on so long ago. If you find a new bug after using a product for 10 years, you are probably out of luck.
- 2. Performance Improvement.** Usually (although certainly not always), a new version of a product will run faster than the old version, even when using the same hardware. In fact, you should expect this from any major upgrade, and if the opposite is true, consider reverting to the old version. In particular, database vendors are always trying to make their software run

faster in order to obtain a competitive advantage. Companies compete to be the fastest as measured by industry standard performance tests, such as those published by the “Transaction Processing Performance Council” at [www.tpc.org](http://www.tpc.org).

- 3. New Functionality.** Just as companies strive for faster performance, they are also always adding new features. Sometimes these two goals are in conflict. When new features degrade performance, it is known as “bloat”. For database engines in particular, bloat is seldom a problem, due to the high priority attached to performance. Database management tools and integrated development environments, on the other hand, are just as susceptible to feature overload as Microsoft Office. But if you need or want the new features that come with a new version, you will have to upgrade.

Major new functionality is in itself often sufficient justification to upgrade, such as the introduction of Oracle Spatial with version 8. However even small feature improvements can provide a big boost for productivity in an office or development shop.

**If you are considering** upgrading hardware or software, and have questions or need assistance, we would be happy to help. Just call **713-344-1718** or email [mtaylor@itrpro.com](mailto:mtaylor@itrpro.com).

## What Are Keyboard Shortcuts and Why Should I Use Them?

— Bob Jenner

Keyboard shortcuts are short combinations of keys that when pressed can create a specific action that would usually require several more steps. For example, to select all the text on a page (in Microsoft Word) you would need to go to the File menu, select the Edit tab and choose "Select All" from the menu (or click Home, Select, Select All in Word 2007/2010). The keyboard shortcut for that task is a simple Ctrl + A. It performs the same task with fewer key-strokes.

As a follow on article to our Windows Key Shortcuts last month, I thought you might enjoy reading about general windows shortcuts that you can use every day. Here is another example: How often have you been in an application and needed to find the "help" menu to look up a function? The keyboard shortcut for this (in most Windows applications) is F1, the first function key on the top of the keyboard on the left hand side. The function keys have different uses in different programs. When you are in the Windows Desktop, pressing F3 will open a search window, while pressing F6 will cycle through the Desktop, the Start Menu, the Taskbar, the System Tray, and the Quick Launch toolbar.

Many programs also provide application-specific keyboard shortcuts that make working with menus easier. Check the menus of programs you use for keyboard shortcuts. If you see letters on the menu that are underlined, they are probably your shortcuts! Try pressing the Alt key and an underlined letter and see if that menu opens. Chances are, it will!

The following list details some useful keyboard shortcuts for daily use. Why not give them a try and see how productive you can be! Enjoy...

Press This Key	Get This Result
Ctrl + A	Select everything in a document or window
Ctrl + Any Arrow Key + Spacebar	Select multiple items in a window or on the Desktop
Ctrl + Shift with an Arrow Key	Select a block of text
Shift with any Arrow Key	Select multiple items at once
Ctrl + C or Ctrl + Insert	Copy selected item(s)
Ctrl + D or Delete Key	Delete selected item (send to Recycle Bin)
Shift + Delete	Delete selected item (No Recycle Bin)
Ctrl + B	Make selected text Bold
Ctrl + I	Make selected text Italic
Ctrl + U	Make selected text Underlined
Ctrl + V or Shift + Insert	Paste
Ctrl + Alt + V	Paste Special
Ctrl + X	Cut selected item(s)
Ctrl + Y	Redo an action
Ctrl + Z	Undo an action
Ctrl + Up Arrow Key	Move cursor to the start of the previous paragraph
Ctrl + Down Arrow Key	Move cursor to the start of the next paragraph
Ctrl + Left Arrow Key	Move cursor to the start of the previous word
Ctrl + Right Arrow Key	Move cursor to the start of the next word
Ctrl + Esc (The Escape Key)	Open the "Start" menu
Ctrl + Shift + Esc	Open Task Manager
Alt + Enter	Display properties of an item
Alt + Tab	Switch between open programs
Alt + Tab	(repeat until desired program is selected)
Alt + Underlined Letter	Display the menu corresponding to the letter
F1	Display Help system
F2	Rename selected item
F3	Search Desktop or document
F4	Select the address bar in My Computer/Explorer
Ctrl + F4	Close the active document window
Ctrl + F4	(in programs that allow you to have multiple open)
Alt + F4	Close the active item
F5	Refresh the active screen window
F10	Display the menu bar in the active program
Shift + F10	Display the Shortcut Menu for the selected item

## Tales from the Trenches

— Candace Doler

*This is a series that will allow you an opportunity to look into your colleagues' real world business lives, in order to learn from their mistakes - without having to make those mistakes! These are actual incidents from real organizations. No names or other identifying information is included.*

**We recently got a new client** because they were having issues with their previous computer service provider. This client was a manufacturing company, and the owner had a suspicion that their network was not being cared for like it should be. Complaints about their previous provider included:

- ◆ They didn't return calls in a timely manner, and sometimes not at all, when service issues were reported.
- ◆ They were not doing what they said they would do; issues were not being taken care of as promised or as they should have been.
- ◆ Employees had access to information that should have been only accessible to the administrator.
- ◆ The owner felt that they were only providing a band-aid approach to network support.

To date, this client had not had a problem with downtime or lost data. But they were concerned about this unacceptable level of service. They felt that it would only be a matter of time before something would happen that could be very costly to them.

**When we brought the client on board**, we were able to validate that their network had a lot of issues, as they had suspected. Plus, we uncovered many more issues through the audit that we performed during the on-boarding process. Some of these major issues included:

- ◆ Back-ups were being done, but they did not include all of the company's data.
- ◆ Their recent migration to a new server was not complete. Their accounting software was put into a new area on the server, without being set up for appropriate back-up.
- ◆ Other people in the organization were still putting information on the old server, which was not being backed up at all.

This is a classic example of an organization or business that depends on their service provider to

set up their network and backups. The service provider should include reporting to validate that they are following these industry best practices:

- ◆ Complete backups
- ◆ Regular restores of these backups
- ◆ Regular maintenance of the network
- ◆ Keeping all antivirus updates current on all desktops and servers throughout the entire network
- ◆ Maintaining antivirus protection even on older computers even if they are only performing one or two functions and are not used regularly

### As an administrator or business

**owner**, you should request that your service provider gives you some type of proof and assurance that the important things are being done in a timely manner. They should provide you with their Best Practices and proof that these practices are being adhered to. If they are not able to provide this level of service then you should find someone who can.



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## Inquiring Minds...

**Do you remember** the movie *Minority Report*, where the Tom Cruise character manipulates a computer display by simply waving his arms in the air? Or when he walks past an advertising poster on the street, and the poster addresses him *by name*? That day may already be here.

The newly released Microsoft Kinect controller for Xbox not only has the ability to react to gestures, it can also recognize faces and spoken language. In contrast to the Wii and the PlayStation Move, the Kinect does not require the user to wear anything or hold anything. It operates at a distance by using infrared scanning, a microphone array, and some sophisticated pattern recognition software.

Microsoft invested considerable resources into developing and marketing the Kinect system as a gaming device, since there is a built in Xbox market. But it's easy to imagine scientific and technical applications too, even if they are not as profitable. The release of the Kinect was followed by a strange flip-flop from Microsoft. Here's what happened: Shortly after the product was launched, a do-it-yourself electronics company, called **Adafruit**, announced the "Open Kinect Project", a contest to develop open source device drivers for the Kinect. The prize was a mere \$3,000, but that was more than enough to attract hobbyist hackers from around the world. According to **CNET**, Microsoft reacted with this statement: "Microsoft does not condone the modification of its products ... [we will] work closely with law enforcement and product safety groups to keep Kinect tamper-resistant."

**In less than a week**, hacker Hector Martin from Spain, using a Linux laptop with OpenGL (and without an Xbox) had been awarded the prize. A few days later, Microsoft's position appeared to change - saying "the software and hardware that are part of Kinect for Xbox 360 have not been modified", so the Kinect itself wasn't really hacked *per se*. Later, in an interview on **NPR**, Microsoft spokespeople said the USB interface was left open "by design", and that they are "very excited to see that people are so inspired". Microsoft Research is also promoting the use of Kinect technology in the academic world.

Is Microsoft really encouraging "crowd-sourcing"? For another indication, take a look at the Microsoft Robotics Developer Studio. This is a suite of software and developer tools, simulators, tutorials, examples, and documentation, specifically designed for the do-it-yourselfer.

Early versions have been available for purchase since 2006, but as of May, 2010, the complete R3 release is available as a free download from [www.microsoft.com/robotics](http://www.microsoft.com/robotics).



**Is there a Roomba in your closet?** That's the first widely-available robot intended for home use, with over 2.5 million units sold. Celebrating their 20th anniversary this year, the iRobot Corporation not only makes this robot vacuum cleaner, but also industrial robots for search and rescue, healthcare, law enforcement, and the U. S. Military. And they are encouraging do-it-yourselfers as well. For the student or casual hobbyist, they offer the low-cost iRobot Create programmable robot, based on the Roomba platform. For students and educators, they maintain the Starter Program for the Advancement of Robotics Knowledge web portal at [spark.irobot.com](http://spark.irobot.com). For the serious third-party developer or inventor, there is the Robot Development Kit, based on the iRobot Packbot platform - the same platform used by first responders and the army. If you've been good this year, look for one of those under the Christmas tree!

— Tom Warfield



**HAPPY  
HOLIDAYS!**



... from all of us at  
**ITR Technologies, LLC**  
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