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The recent big news from Microsoft concerns the upcoming release of Windows 10 later this year. The announcement was that all devices currently running Windows 7 & 8 will be eligible for free upgrades to Windows 10. I've been using Windows 10 beta on a couple of PCs for a few months now and I like to tell people it's more like Windows 7.5 in appearance and operation. It offers a start button closer in function to Windows 7, than the often criticized Windows 8 offering. The user has the ability to modify the specific tiles that are displayed along with the start button selections in Windows 10 and this addresses part of the difficultly many people have with Windows 8.

I remember back quite a few years ago when the release of a new operating system was a major event in the life of us geeks. There were a few times when standing in line to purchase a copy of the latest release was on a par with standing in line to buy the first iPhone. The home PC market was originally targeted by Microsoft and the business PC environment was IBM's domain. Then the companies had a falling out and both went after the other environment. There was real excitement in seeing the latest features in the newest version of Windows and then seeing how IBM countered with the next version of OS/2. It seems so archaic that we used to buy an OS that was installed with a box of 10 - 20 diskettes and then we evolved to getting it on a CD!

Of course we know that Microsoft won the PC and server OS battle and that IBM was left with the mainframe world (yes, there are still mainframes in use), but the maturity of the OS has left us with relatively mild changes from one version to another now, compared to the rapid advancements we used to see with the user interface in the early versions. I remember when the right click on an icon was new and allowed a new level of customization and access to tailoring that we never had before.

I think I only ever saw Windows version 1 & 2 on a couple of PCs and based on those, it is a wonder that there ever was a Windows 3 that finally was adopted as useful by the user community. I once saw Bill Gates as the keynote speaker at a predominantly mainframe conference, back in the days when Microsoft was working with IBM. Even he experienced firsthand what every presenter goes through at some point in their career, when their demo blows up unexpectedly. He won us over though, by giving every audience attendee a free copy of the latest version of Windows.

The most dangerous virus that I have seen impacted a couple of people who came to me for help over the last two months. It is the type of threat that essentially locks out your files, including attached backup drives, until you pay them a ransom. There was even a story about this on the major news networks last week, when a Police

Department ended up paying a $600 fee to get their critical files unlocked. The best practice is always to never open an attachment unless you are certain about its legitimacy. As great as the internet is for easy access to data and information, the risk is always there for easy ways for bad people to pass along things that can do real harm. I once had a boss who believed that sensitive data, like banking information, would never be accessible through the open internet, due to the inherent risks of data access by unauthorized people.

Time has proven him wrong but, recently I have met many people who are looking at ways to go back to unconnected PCs (XP lives!!) to perform a certain set of tasks, without the risk of unauthorized access. Not a bad approach, if you are fortunate to have software that can operate unconnected, which is a rarity in today's always connected world.