How a Windows 11 migration can actually save you money (Ep. 55)

[00:07 Weston Morris]

Well, welcome to the Digital Workplace Deep Dive. I'm your host, Weston Morris. Let's talk about Windows 10 end of life. To help me with that, I've invited two experts, Eric Harris, a solution manager for modern device management at Unisys, and Stefano Izzo, a modern workplace architect here at Unisys. Welcome, gentlemen.

[00:30 Eric Harris]

Welcome. Looking forward to it. Thank you, sir.

[00:30 Stefano Izzo]

Thank you, Weston.

[00:33 Weston Morris]

So, let's go back to that point. Windows 10 end of life. Hey, how much time is left?

[00:38 Eric Harris]

Oh, that's a great question, Weston. Depending on when you're listening to this podcast, it's really just a matter of months. Per Microsoft, end of support is October 14th of 25. It is on the horizon, approaching fast.

[00:56 Weston Morris]

So, thinking back in the past, we've all been through a lot of Windows or OS upgrades and way back — I don't know, Windows 3-1-1, it wasn't such a big deal to hear about end of life or end of support. I mean, nothing bad happens the day after, right? It doesn't explode. It doesn't stop working. Your apps still work. The OS has been running for several years, even with Windows 10. Most of the bugs are out of it. So what? I can't call Microsoft for support. What is the problem that we're really facing here?

[01:26 Eric Harris]

Weston, you're spot on. The operative word in your statement there was "in the past." Historically, most enterprises could run older operating systems well past end of support. But these days, given the attack surface and vulnerabilities, bad actors are looking to exploit the moment a new patch is released or security updates are released. Yeah, it's a big deal these days.

[01:51 Weston Morris]

I think what I hear you saying, Eric, is it's really a security issue more than anything else. So, what are the options? Is Microsoft just totally pulling support after October 13th, or is there any other option available to them?

[02:03 Eric Harris]

Well, there is an option from Microsoft, and of course, they're going to ask you to pay up. Starting on October 14th, after support ends for Windows 10 per device, you can get the security updates at 61 U.S. dollars. Let's say an average enterprise has 10,000 PCs. If you want to extend the support for one calendar year, it's going to cost you $610,000 for year one. That's year one. Now, in year two and year three, it's going to double each year. You go from $600,000 to $1.2 million to $1.8 million. All told, you can pay for them and get them. But I think there are other options.

[02:48 Weston Morris]

Gotcha. Well, Eric and Stefano, I did just a little bit of research and trying to figure out how big of a problem is this. And as of February of this year, reports say that nearly 60% of all the PCs, laptops, desktops, whatever globally, they've not been upgraded yet to Windows 11. What's holding people back?

[03:08 Stefano Izzo]

Yeah, absolutely. I think the key issue here is the steep hardware requirements that come with Windows 11. There are a significant number of devices within each organization that are actually incompatible with Windows 11. There is a component of hardware refresh that comes alongside the software update. I think that's really what's holding up a lot of clients.

[03:32 Eric Harris]

Yeah, you're right, Stefano. I think what we're seeing is one out of four devices today cannot be upgraded due to either the TPM requirement or they have insufficient processing power.

[03:43 Stefano Izzo]

Yeah, I think Eric, as you said, that TPM requirement is quite a big one especially. I think some of the research that I was looking at where they were taking into consideration five enterprises from across different industries. So collectively, that's about 70,000 devices,

and really a quarter of those machines were incompatible with Windows 11. If they were to replace all those devices, that would account for $15, $20 million. It's quite a lot of money.

[04:10 Weston Morris]

Oh, my goodness. You guys are piling on the costs here. So, if I have to replace hardware, we're talking millions, perhaps. The cost of not upgrading, Eric, you highlighted that it's a big chunk of money that I'm keeping each year, and it doubles two years after that. You know, prior to this podcast, as we sat down and we talked about this a little bit, Eric, you said something that really caught my attention. You said that really, this Windows 11 migration could actually be the first migration that could actually save money, and I'm not hearing that. You got to help me here. How's this possible?

[04:45 Eric Harris]

Yeah, absolutely. And it catches everybody by surprise when you make that statement because if you compare the traditional approach, everybody says, "Hey, we have an upgrade coming. I have some hardware that's non-compatible." What's the first thing we're going to do? We're going to go out there, buy brand new hardware with the new operating system, do some application compatibility, that whole process that happens.

[05:03 Eric Harris]

But let's flip this on its head just a little bit. Rather than look from the device side, let's look at the user and the persona side. We need to stop and assess where our users are working and where their workloads are at, and I think when we do that, we can find some interesting use cases, which I'll jump right into.

[05:26 Eric Harris]

One of the ways that we can do this is, depending on the persona group, we can extend the life of these, let's say, non-Windows 11 compliant devices; what we can do is replace the operating system with a lightweight operating system where users can access a VDI, for example. Or let's say this particular user group or persona group only accesses SAS-only applications. They don't have any apps local to their device. They just log in, hit a browser, and access all these applications.

[05:58 Eric Harris]

The reason this is lighter weight or lower cost is that the hardware requirements for these lightweight operating systems aren't as strict or as rigid as what you need to run Windows

11, for example. I did mention VDI. That's the second example here. Some clients today have deployed VDI or maybe a small subset of user groups or personas, but given some of the enhancements and bandwidth and processing power in the cloud, there's a way to then push some of these workloads up into the cloud and then from there, you can scale faster, quicker and then you have a little tighter control around your user workloads and where they're computing at.

[06:37 Eric Harris]

Now I want to jump into, we've laid down a lightweight operating system on non-Windows 11 compliant devices. When that device dies or is replaced, you don't have to buy a fully specced out device anymore. Let's say you don't need the latest I7 chipset coming in from Intel, you don't need a maxed out RAM, you can get a lighter-weight device. Again, now your investment costs for that device is significantly less.

[07:04 Eric Harris]

The other thing that I'll add to this is, let's look at Microsoft licensing. Historically, most organizations, what do they do? They have E3 or E5 for their whole enterprise. Now that you've done this assessment of hey, this user group does workloads, let's say SAS only or a smaller tablet device, you don't need that E3 or E5 anymore. You may be able to get away with an F3, for example. Again, now lowering your cost from Microsoft.

[07:34 Stefano Izzo]

Yeah, absolutely. These are all amazing use cases and options, but something that caught my attention where we're talking is that I was actually going to bring up a case of a client where they're going in the exact opposite direction and they're actually looking to spend more money on their hardware as a result of the upgrade to Windows 11.

[07:53 Weston Morris]

Wait a minute. We're going in the wrong direction here, Stefano. Eric just walked us through all kinds of reasons, examples looking at the personas, how we could actually reuse and repurpose some of these older devices and save money, and do I hear you right? You're saying that you have an example of a client that is intentionally spending more money on their hardware as part of the Windows 11 migration? You have to walk me through that.

[08:12 Stefano Izzo]

Yeah, absolutely. I think this is really the case. There's not a right or wrong approach. I think it very much depends on what application each client has. This client of ours, for example, they're a construction company. And they tend to have engineers and project managers sort of spread across the world. Generally, large construction sites, often at remote locations, and I'm sure you guys, maybe some of our listeners, will have heard from Microsoft when they announced their new Copilot+ PCs.

[08:39 Stefano Izzo]

A lot of the AI processing that comes with those machines can now be run locally on the device, and the great benefit of that is that you no longer require that cloud connection to run some of the image processing and some of the advanced calculations that those engineers need. So before, these powerful machines would require a strong internet connection, but that might potentially introduce latency if that wasn't quite the case. Now, with these more powerful machines in power hardware, they can actually run all their models, so the engineers can continue to work even at a remote location. This is just an example of where spending more money on expensive hardware can actually be the answer instead of trying to save money on cheaper devices. It really depends on the use case.

[09:29 Weston Morris]

I love that. So, what I hear you saying, Stefano, is you've got a customer or a client that is actually thinking of maybe not going to be ready yet for AI to run locally — small language models, things like that for their specific business, but they see them coming, and they don't want to have to buy PCs for Windows 11 migration and then not have them be the right type of processing power for their next wave, which would be AI. OK, good thinking there.

[09:53 Weston Morris]

Hey, now Stefano, as we were talking prior to the podcast, you mentioned to me, in addition to the actual Windows 11 migration, that some of your customers are using this as an opportunity to take a step back. And look at their entire device selection process, their device management strategy, and those processes, and making some changes there.

[10:15 Weston Morris]

Can you talk a little bit more about why that is so important at this point in time?

[10:20 Stefano Izzo]

Yeah. I have a couple of examples for you here, Weston, because, as we just said, it really depends on the application, what each user does and what each persona does within the organization. What we've done for a client of ours from a city organization that realized that a significant portion of their estate was due for a replacement; they were no longer compatible with Windows 11.

[10:45 Stefano Izzo]

Instead of just replacing the hardware, we really just sat down, tried to take a step back and did a bit of an assessment in terms of which personas are there within the organizations, what devices are needed, and tried to work out the right fit. The right type of machine for each of those personas. So, for example, there are standard information workers. They receive a fairly standard machine that allows them to do their work, whereas their engineers and scientists who do more advanced calculations now have a more powerful machine for that type of operation. Whereas, the clients are actually able to save money from more of a field operation, manufacturing staff that don't actually require a very powerful machine. It can also rely on shared devices, so we help them there.

[11:36 Stefano Izzo]

We also introduce Windows 365 and some of those shared models that are relatively new and really come in handy in those scenarios. I think that was a good example of where sitting down and trying to sort of take a step back and look at different personas can be a great opportunity to pair with the Windows 11 upgrade.

[11:57 Weston Morris]

You know, Stefano, I can imagine just from past history and looking at how different organizations buy PCs, store them, stock them, provision them, that if you look at the life cycle of the PC, there's probably a good percentage of time that they're not actually in front of a person where they can be productive. And so this optimization of the asset management you're talking about, I think this is actually a great time if I'm going to buy new PCs for Windows 11, let's do that as well.

[12:20 Stefano Izzo]

Absolutely.

[12:22 Weston Morris]

Yeah. Now, Stefano, you also did mention in addition to this optimization of device selection that it's a great time to also look at the device management process. Can you expand on that just a little bit?

[12:38 Stefano Izzo]

Yeah, absolutely. Because fundamentally the upgrade to Windows 11 is really designed to be very simple if you use Intune and Windows updates and all the kind of modern management technology. I think the issue arises where clients are still relying heavily on SCCM and legacy traditional technologies.

[12:56 Stefano Izzo]

So when we come across those sorts of scenarios with our clients, the first step we would take would not be to just go straight into the Windows 11 upgrade but try to let them leverage these modern update technologies, especially in shooting Windows Update for business, which could be done either through co-management instead of full cloud. Because some of the issues that most of those clients had in terms of updates are not being downloaded or there is latency with updates. Then, we'll carry it across to the Windows 11 update migration.

[13:29 Stefano Izzo]

What we notice is that after leveraging more updated technologies with the management technology, the update was much more seamless. Updates will be downloaded much faster, and the compliance overall across the organization will be much higher, which in turn just increases user satisfaction. So it's absolutely key that the Windows 11 upgrade is sort of carried out through that modern management technology and not just with the traditional tools that. That's absolutely key.

[13:55 Weston Morris]

I guess I've heard some stories where, Stefano, where if an enterprise has upgraded their device management to Intune and they have provisioning over there and Autopilot that this Windows 11 migration, the actual migration is kind of like a service pack upgrade.

[14:13 Stefano Izzo]

Absolutely.

[14:14 Weston Morris]

But if I have not invested in the back-end infrastructure, now it's a whole other thing. I mean, is there any other alternative? What if we're looking at just a few weeks, maybe months, here before the end of life. And they'd say I just can't upgrade to Intune. Is there anything else we can offer to them that would make that upgrade easier?

[14:32 Eric Harris]

Yeah, as a matter of fact, I mean we have a solution here at Unisys that allows us to remotely upgrade the operating system from Windows 10 to Windows 11 even if the client that we're engaged with does not have Intune, is not running Autopilot. And we've been very successful in upgrading actually Unisys' environment from Windows 10 to 11 using this technology.

[15:00 Weston Morris]

Very cool. Well, I think this might be a good time to just kind of recap. Here's what I've heard so far today. Windows 11 migration has to happen here soon for a lot of people. There are costs if you don't. There are security issues if you don't. But then there's even potential hardware costs.

[15:16 Weston Morris]

But you've identified here very nicely some opportunities for cost savings. If you take a step back and look at your entire device lifecycle process, your platform — I love what you were suggesting there, Stefano, about looking at the personas. Eric, you touched on that, too. What's the right device? What is the right operating system even for somebody? Maybe they don't even need Windows.

[15:38 Weston Morris]

That's a kind of game changing in my mind as well, moving to VDI in some instances, reusing or repurposing these legacy laptops that maybe aren't compatible with Windows 11 in a different way. Really good. I just have one last question. Is there anything we've missed that we want to cover?

[15:55 Eric Harris]

Yes, as a matter of fact, we have. I'm glad you asked that question. It was one thing that my peer Scott Wollaston just recently talked about in his Windows 11 blog post. He spends a lot of time talking about an enhanced security posture. Yes, we know everybody's

upgrading from 10 to 11 to cover off some of the security issues that we've mentioned or that bad actors historically like to take advantage of.

[16:18 Eric Harris]

But when you get a new PC running Windows 11, a lot of enterprises now have the ability to enable something that is resident in the BIOS today on nearly every new OEM hardware. It gives you the ability — Let's think of Apple's Find My phone. Before you lose your iPhone, you can go, and you can figure out where it's at.

[16:43 Eric Harris]

With this BIOS-enabled software, you can geolocate your device. You can geo-block your device if it's in the wrong geolocation, and if needed, you can remotely wipe a device if it's lost. I mean, we've all heard stories of someone leaving a laptop in a taxi, or their backpack got stolen, or a CEO of a client I used to support many years left it in the seat back on his airplane during a connection and landed in another airport and forgot he lost it so — forgot where it was at. So, there's some technology that exists today that allows you to add that extra layer of security to locate those devices and wipe them remotely, enhancing your overall security posture.

[17:25 Weston Morris]

Yeah, I mean, I'm so glad you brought that up. I mean, we've had this for phones, right? Can locate wipes for a decade or more. More than a decade, really. Why can't I do it with my PCs and my laptops? So, you're saying that's available now? Awesome. And this is a great time to think about it when you're doing your Windows 11 migration as well. Just turn that feature on.

[17:42 Weston Morris]

Cool. Well, I'd just like to thank my guests here, Eric Harris. Stefano Izzo. You guys have generously given your time here to let me pick your brains about this kind of time bomb, we might say, the Windows 10 end of life, Windows 11 migration. Some great suggestions about how to make that more successful and perhaps even save money short term, long term, as part of that process. Thank you, gentlemen.

[18:09 Stefano Izzo]

Thank you, Weston.

[18:09 Eric Harris]

Yeah, thank you. Looking forward to enhancing this conversation a little further.

[18:13 Weston Morris]

Speaking of which, I think anyone that wants to reach out to you, I know you guys love having these types of conversations, people can find you on LinkedIn, and I think Eric, that blog you just mentioned that Scott published, maybe we'll post a link to that in the episode notes as well for others to dig into. Thank you.

[18:34 Weston Morris]

Well, this brings to an end another episode of the Digital Workplace Deep Dive. I'm your host Weston Morris. Thanks for listening.