

Keeping Up with Computer Updates

A Weekly Sunday Newsletter from Stilson Video Services



Sometimes old legacy computers can be the most worry free

This week, I'm dealing with a bug in my newly updated system software which led to the inspiration for this newsletter.

As we all know technology never sits still.

For those of us who work on computers, there is always pressure to keep our systems current so we don't fall behind with the applications we use and the system software that runs our computers.

About 80% of people in the US still use a laptop or desktop computer, even though an increasing amount of time is spent on smart phones. There are certain tasks, however, that benefit from a larger monitor and a keyboard.

Over the years I've found myself working with customers on their personal computers. I'm often surprised by how old and outdated their computers are. But on the other hand, the customer can still usually perform the required task with minimal frustration, and there's something to be said for that.

It's good practice, however, to keep our computers current for security reasons, if nothing else. Some users simply let the computer update automatically, but that's not always the best

practice. This can lead to a common scenario...one day everything is working fine... then an update rolls through in the night, something changes, and suddenly you're trying to figure out what broke.

In the studio, I'm usually running several computers at any one time. Some are old systems that I keep around specifically to handle legacy formats. Others are newer machines running current software.

And I have to say... the older computers are often far less stressful.

They do exactly what I expect them to do. No surprises. No updates required so I can keep them offline. They just work. But on the other hand, the clock is ticking, I know that one day I will try to boot up "old reliable" and nothing will happen.

The newer systems are a different story. Constant updates, new features, and the problems that come with them. Staying current can feel like a job in itself—and it takes time away from the work that actually matters.

So where's the happy medium for most of us?

Here is my advice for keeping your home computer relatively current while avoiding some of the inevitable headaches that come with updating software:

Rule number 1 - Never do a major update on your computer in the middle of a large project, whether it be to the system software or the application(s) you are using.

On computers that I cannot afford to have go down—for example, my production editing systems—I follow these general guidelines. The exception to the following are **security updates**, I allow those within 1-2 days of release.

- **Dot release upgrades to application software***

Wait a minimum of 15 days after release to make sure the update does no harm (unless it fixes a bug I'm currently dealing with). If problems are reported, I skip that release, wait for the next one, and repeat the process.

- **Major updates to application software**

Wait at least 30 days to ensure that all third-party software

and hardware are fully compatible.

- **Major operating system updates**

Wait 30–60 days after release to confirm stability and compatibility. Never upgrade to a “.0” operating system release. There is always a follow-up update shortly after that addresses early issues.

While waiting to upgrade, information can be found on support websites, forums and comments from users about what they’re experiencing after making upgrades.

Remember, Just because a new software version is released does not mean your current version isn’t useful anymore. In fact, if you’re happy and comfortable with an application, don’t feel pressured to upgrade unless there are new features you could really use.

*Example of a dot release upgrade to an application: **Version 3.0**

→ **3.1** → **3.2** Those **.1, .2 updates are dot releases.**

Dot releases are meant to be incremental improvements, not major changes. They typically include:

- Bug fixes
- Performance improvements
- Security patches
- Small feature tweaks
- Compatibility updates

They are generally designed to improve stability

Lives are important.

Our mission is to connect them to future generations the best way possible.

Finally, if you have a topic you’d like me to write about, let me know at [**stilson@stilson.com**](mailto:stilson@stilson.com) and I’ll add it to the list.

— Bill Stilson

Stilson Video Services

216-595-5155

www.stilson.com

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