

End-of-Life Is Not The End

Don't be pressured by the OEM. End users don't need to spend endless dollars on new equipment each and every time the Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) tells them they have to. In fact, in many cases, end users have a far less expensive option: to continue using their existing computer technologies through maintenance and parts replacements from a third-party maintenance provider (TPM).

You Have Options

Since 1986, Service Express, Inc. (SEI) is one such third-party maintenance provider. Chad Peters is head of product support. As such, he has an excellent perspective on how OEMs try to convince customers to invest more money on the newest products and he's been there when clients decide to take another route.

"Our main focus is on providing third-party hardware service," Peters explains. This can include providing break-fix support on major computer and storage systems. TPMs generally work on a contractual basis with each customer. When a problem arises, the customer calls and a service engineer arrives on-site to take care of the problem.

The OEM message is that they can no longer support their older products after the latest, greatest models are released. The OEM might say that it cannot provide parts for an older server, for instance. OEMs often buy parts from themselves, so when they run out - that's it for that product line.

But in today's challenging economic environment, where every penny counts and then some, many end users balk at the price tag of the newest computer products being pushed on them by the OEM.

Finding the "Sweet Spot"

It can be extremely helpful for end users to know that support and parts for legacy and older systems are available from third-party providers.

"We can keep things going pretty long after the OEM end-of-support date," says Peters. "There's lots of room between end-of-life and brand-new products."

That room can consist of maintenance and replacement parts for legacy systems after the OEM stops providing support, as well as moves to newer (but not necessarily the newest) equipment once maintenance of legacy systems is no longer cost-effective. It is the job of third-party providers to find the "sweet spot" where both price and equipment are right for the customer's budget and IT needs.

To determine exactly what this sweet spot means, let's compare it with the price "roller coaster" which awaits customers who buy brand new. When buying new, the price of computer equipment and the price of replacement parts will be the highest. Eventually, end users reach a window of three to seven years where prices level off. But once this window closes and the equipment gets older, the cost of parts goes up, while their quality goes down. Then the end user is faced with the decision of buying brand-new (and taking the roller coaster ride) all over again.

A third-party maintenance provider tries to keep customers off this wild ride by closely working with end users to determine their computing needs and the best solution to meet those needs.

The Right Partnership

For best results to support your legacy computer needs, your third-party maintenance provider needs to partner with you. The TPM needs to have established track records with several

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qualified vendors who can provide parts for those computers. Then the TPM ensures that it can attain proper documentation, support and firmware for the equipment. Experienced and trained service engineers are the other essential part of the equation in keeping your equipment up and running.

Looking Ahead

The third-party maintenance provider needs to have good relationships with its parts vendors so it will know when parts are readily available for legacy systems and then know when those parts are becoming harder to find. It is then that the TPM will go back to the customer to let them know that the cost-effective window for their legacy systems is about to close and perhaps an upgrade to a newer system is in order. Newer and still cost-effective, not necessarily the newest.

Keeping customers in the “sweet spot” as long as possible is a third-party maintenance provider’s specialty.

About Service Express, Inc. (SEI): SEI is a third-party maintenance provider specializing in flexible on-site data center maintenance for mainframe, midrange and Intel-based servers for IBM, DEC, HP, Sun and Dell; as well as EMC and STK storage. Additional services include: software support, data center relocations and hardware sales solutions. For more information about our services, please contact us at 800.940.5585.