



Maintenance Perspectives
Ways to get more from your hardware agreements

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle - Re-examined

OEM EOSL policies generate millions of tons of landfill waste

April 19, 2011

Keep an eye out for typos.

Details are at the bottom of this newsletter's content.

The issue is 'green' either way

In recent weeks, Heather Clancy at ZDNet has posted two articles regarding the [eCycling Leadership Initiative](#) and recent improvements [by Dell in particular](#) to cut down on the amount of post-end-of-life hardware ending up in landfills. While the numbers are staggering, and a 16% improvement is better than further decline, the underlying truth isn't so rosy. The reason there's so much data center hardware wastage in the first place is that original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) revoke support on older models to pressure customers to purchase the latest and greatest models.

OEMs will talk all day about sending them old hardware to 'recycle' it - sometimes right into a landfill based on the Dell numbers. Virtualized hardware OEMs will talk about 'reduce' as well, but getting rid of ten servers to use five is a net increase, not a reduction. You will only rarely hear any OEMs suggest reusing machines, either by moving critical machines to non-critical roles or by finding non-OEM support options, to keep them out of landfills.

The immediate issue with implementing a 'reuse' policy is an issue of support, in one of two varieties (and sometimes both). A necessary OS or other software upgrade may render the hardware incompatible - a particular concern to whole-stack customers of OEMs like Oracle and IBM who develop the software and the hardware both, and can use either one to sell the other, such as we see in the Itanium hardware controversy playing out today. Or, more commonly, an OEM simply declares a given product 'end of service life' (EOSL) meaning that support options after the cutoff date are limited or nonexistent with the OEM. In all these cases the issue isn't always purely about performance and energy efficiency. OEMs are in the business of making and selling machines, and when existing machines reach a certain level of market saturation the OEMs have no choice but to make and sell something new. Features and technology certainly affect the lifecycle, but the fact that some OEMs can produce a lifecycle plan 5-10 years removed suggests that the main factor is profit, rather than technology advances.

Legacy advocates: Third Party Maintainers

If OEMs are understandably reluctant to advocate reuse of older hardware, other options exist in the marketplace when it comes to solving the support issues of EOSL hardware, namely Third Party Maintainers (TPMs).

Hardware TPMs can generally maintain EOSL hardware indefinitely, though the costs and service levels may vary greatly so be sure to discuss both in detail with the sales representative. Software TPMs may even be able to maintain older versions of software on compatible EOSL machines, via custom patches or other mods. Usually that's reserved for mission critical legacy systems that can't be migrated or converted at a manageable cost, because it's a long-term solution. Hardware TPMs on the other hand may be employed on a subset of the whole data center and assist in maintaining high service levels on EOSL hardware during a phased transition to newer models. For large, multi-location datacenters the upgrade process can take nearly as long as the service life of some hardware, so it can be an ongoing process rather than a one-time project.

Ultimately the decision should be in your hands as the customer, though OEMs may have a great deal of leverage over the choices you make. All change projects are difficult and complex at scale, but if there is a way to keep literally billions of tons of hardware each year - enough to fill up the volume of a football stadium, if the ZDNet's numbers are accurate - out of landfills and the water supply, this is in itself a noble goal to pursue. When that goal can also preserve your budget and extend the value of your existing hardware and software, it's all the better. In any case, rather than buy in to the idea that OEMs have only the environment or your business in mind with their hardware recycling programs, you can now approach these opportunities with eyes wide open, understanding that OEMs aren't responsible for your internal sustainability efforts.

Free Maintenance Consultation

Independent hardware maintenance is an ideal choice not only for true sustainability efforts, but independence from OEM control over your hardware choices in the datacenter. Talk with a TERiX sales consultant and let us know some [basic information](#) about your business and your datacenter locations, and we can get in touch quickly with relevant information so you can compare vendors and capabilities. [Click through](#) to find out more!

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