

Office Maintenance:

Computer Hardware & Software

In today's dental office, computerization is the norm. Computer systems are in place in most offices to run: business systems, schedules, clinical charting, clinical diagnosis and patient education. In many offices, every room has instant access to each of these software tools through the office network. This network, like many other dental items is a costly start-up expense to the office. If you elect to computerize your office, you need to protect this investment. This means a few new maintenance items need to be considered and budgeted for in the operating expenses:

1. Software Support and Updates
2. Hardware Obsolescence
3. Network Maintenance



Why do I need this maintenance & support contract and should I continue paying for it?

Uncontrolled changes in Operating Systems:

All computers are driven by "Operating Systems." An operating system is the software that drives the computer to run all other installed software and communicate with other computers and the internet. "WINDOWS" used to be associated with what one would look out of or into to see through a wall. In our culture, "WINDOWS" is a common term that refers to the worlds largest and most used PC operating system. Unless you are running in a Macintosh environment, your system is probably running one of the Microsoft Windows operating systems. Microsoft has released at least 6 new versions of Windows since 1998. As these new versions are released, other changes to the operating system you are using are often updated on your system without you ever knowing it. These automatic updates are a part of the Windows platform. While they do in many cases make your computer more secure from internet threats and viruses, they can affect the way your clinical and business software run on your system. Each time a new version is released, all other software providers have to adapt their programs to work in the new environment. These adaptations are released in "updates" that help the program to run in the new operating system. So if you are using XL Dent as your practice management software and your imaging software is ImageXL, the company that writes these programs is always monitoring the Windows changes and adapting the program to work in the newest environments.

User requested changes:

As software is used, the users often find changes they would like to see made or additions they would like to have available on the software. As these requests are made to the writers, they are prioritized based on number of requests and functionality. Since so many people use the software and have their own perspective of managing their practice information, these requests can turn into really positive additions to the software. Often updates are small, hard to see changes that may help digital images look better, or speed up processes. Other changes are easier to see like new reports, charts or user tools. As these changes are made, they are usually available through the Get Updates tool on your help menu.

Regardless of what software you choose to run the different aspects of your practice, it is wise to keep your system up to date. This is very important so that as changes are made, your system will be able to handle the new tools as well the new changes in operating systems. If you let your system get too far out of date, it can cause the software to slow down and eventually stop working. Then you have to call in the software specialist to spend hours sorting out the problems.

Network maintenance and Hardware obsolescence:

A computer network can be complex. With multiple softwares and an everchanging operating system along with network and internet security software, conflicts can pop up. Having a relationship with a good local network maintenance company that has experience with Dental software and systems, is a really good partnership to have.

As software changes happen, at some point the computers you bought 3 years ago, don't seem to be as fast. They used to work really well and the software was perfect, but now it's slow and sometimes locks up. Software changes often mean more processes are running in the background. These can use up operating memory. As these new processes are created, new hardware systems are created that are capable of doing more processes and at faster speeds. Eventually your computers will come to a halt and have to be replaced. If you are not planning this in your office budget, when the expense hits, it can really take the wind out of a good month or year.

Do yourself a favor, if you're running your office in a computerized environment, plan for support and maintenance and make yourself a monthly payment to the hardware replacement and reinvestment fund for down the road.