

IDC PERSPECTIVE

The Role of the AI PC in Your Next Fleet Refresh

Tom Mainelli

EXECUTIVE SNAPSHOT

FIGURE 1

Executive Snapshot: The Role of the AI PC in Your Next Fleet Refresh

This IDC Perspective explores challenges and opportunities for IT decision-makers as they prepare to address Microsoft's October 2025 Windows 10 end of service (EOS). It discusses the steps a company should take as it assesses its plans to refresh its Windows PC fleet, the importance of closely partnering with trusted hardware, silicon, and software partners, the new options available in the era of the AI PC, and the importance of planning for a future where AI becomes ever more ubiquitous.

Key Takeaways

- Windows 10 EOS hits on October 14, 2025. After that date, systems running the Microsoft OS will stop receiving security updates unless you pay for extended security updates (ESUs) at \$61 per PC for the first year, doubling each year after.
- While some Windows 10 hardware will support an in-place upgrade to Windows 11, most such PCs are outdated for how people work today, and your IT staff and employees will be best served by replacing them.
- This refresh differs from previous ones because it is more complex due to the rollout of AI PCs that leverage neural processing units (NPUs) to run AI workloads locally.
- A range of AI PCs is available on the market, including hardware-enabled AI PCs with NPUs with <40 TOPS of AI performance and next-generation AI PCs with >40 TOPS of AI performance (branded Copilot+ by Microsoft). Understanding your employees' current and future AI workloads is imperative to making the right purchase decisions.
- Remember that any PCs you deploy now will likely be in place for four or more years.

Recommended Actions

- Review the status of your Windows PC fleet and investigate which systems — if any — could support a Windows 11 upgrade. If you haven't started transitioning from Windows 10 to Windows 11, time is of the essence.
- Prioritize which systems you'll replace and which you'll upgrade. If there are systems you won't get to until after October 2025, budget accordingly for extended security updates.
- Sit down with the independent software vendors (ISVs) that build the software your company runs on. Understand their road map for adding the local AI capabilities you'll want, and the silicon needed to run it.
- Examine the current and planned features Microsoft is rolling out to Copilot+ PCs. OS-level AI functionality will continue to evolve.
- Work closely with trusted hardware and silicon partners to understand what is on offer now and what is coming soon. Understand that you will likely find that you'll want to deploy a mix of non-AI PCs, hardware-enabled AI PCs, and next-gen AI PCs.

Source: IDC, 2024

SITUATION OVERVIEW

October 14, 2025, is an important date for any IT decision-maker (ITDM) charged with managing a company's fleet of Windows PCs. That is the official end-of-service (EOS) date for Windows 10. Beyond this date, to keep existing Windows 10 PCs secure, companies must pay Microsoft a \$61 per PC fee (for the first year) to continue receiving security updates.

Many of these Windows PCs are more than four years old, acquired before the COVID-19 pandemic forced a shift in how employees use PCs toward more mobile work, online collaboration, and video conferencing. These systems have outdated cameras and microphones, failing batteries, and aging security provisions. While some existing Windows 10 systems in your fleet may meet the requirements to support an in-place Windows 11 upgrade, most should be replaced with a new system.

Today's latest Windows PCs bring to employees all the benefits of new hardware, enhanced software and security, and — with a prudent investment in the future — access to the coming flood of local artificial intelligence (AI) and generative AI (GenAI) features. Many of these features promise to help increase end-user productivity and efficiency by offering lower latency, enhanced privacy, and lower costs over cloud-based AI services. Local AI will also help IT to better manage and secure these PCs.

Following is a short primer on how ITDMs should approach their next big refresh. It includes considerations such as leveling up to AI PCs, choosing their hardware and silicon providers, and collaborating with their key software partners to understand how their apps will leverage local AI capabilities to improve employee efficiency and job satisfaction.

Which Windows 10 Systems Can You Upgrade?

When considering an upgrade from Windows 10 to Windows 11, it's essential to determine which of your installed systems can support the new operating system. An in-place upgrade is typically the most straightforward option, allowing users to retain their data and applications without needing a fresh installation. However, not all systems are suitable for this transition, even if they meet the technical requirements.

A system's eligibility for an upgrade hinges on its hardware specifications, as Microsoft has set strict requirements for Windows 11. These include a modern 1GHz processor or faster with two or more cores, at least 4GB of RAM, 64GB of storage, TPM 2.0 support, and UEFI with Secure Boot.

Evaluating Suitability Beyond Compatibility

Just because a system can support Windows 11 doesn't necessarily mean that upgrading is the best decision. The context of their original design is worth considering for systems over four years old. These devices were built before the COVID-19 pandemic significantly shifted workplace dynamics. During this time, video conferencing, virtual collaboration tools, and cloud computing became integral to daily workflows, necessitating more robust hardware capabilities. Older PCs may lack the performance and features to meet these modern demands effectively. These older PCs also lack the benefits of modern manageability features and advanced threat detection, making them increasingly difficult for IT to manage.

Considering New PCs

For systems that have been assessed as needing to be replaced instead of upgraded, it's time to explore what type of Windows PC to purchase next. The decision largely depends on the specific use cases for these systems, especially as AI-capable PCs become a growing part of the market. An AI PC includes a central processing unit (CPU), a graphics processing unit (GPU), and an NPU, all of which can run AI workloads.

What Is an NPU?

An NPU is a specialized hardware component designed to accelerate power-sensitive AI tasks locally on a PC more efficiently than traditional processors like CPUs or GPUs. Measuring a chip's AI performance is often done using trillions of operations per second (TOPS), a crude but useful metric for understanding AI workloads, in that more is better. NPUs allow PCs to process AI tasks directly on the device, reducing latency and enhancing privacy compared with relying solely on cloud-based solutions.

Although Apple introduced the M1 chip in 2020 and has integrated NPUs into its Macs since then, Windows PCs have only recently joined the trend. In the last few years, major chipmakers — including AMD, Intel, and Qualcomm — have introduced NPUs into their silicon, enabling Windows PCs to handle AI workloads locally and efficiently as well as helping users be more productive.

Two Types of AI PCs

IDC currently categorizes Windows AI PCs by the capability of their NPUs in the following manner:

- **Hardware-enabled AI PCs with <40 TOPS NPUs:** These systems are suitable for running lighter inference bursts and sustained AI workloads and do not qualify for the Microsoft Copilot+ PC branding. These are ideal for persistent AI workloads such as voice recognition, real-time noise suppression, and other

routine tasks. Combined with the CPU and GPU, these systems can run many AI workloads locally. AMD and Intel have products in this category, but Qualcomm no longer does.

Next-generation AI PCs with >40 TOPS NPUs: These higher TOPS systems support more demanding AI tasks on the NPU. This allows them to run a wide variety of local AI inference workloads around productivity, collaboration, manageability, and security. Microsoft refers to systems in this category as Copilot+ PCs. To qualify, they must include an NPU delivering >40 TOPS, at least 16GB of RAM, and 256GB of SSD storage. All three major PC silicon providers (AMD, Intel, and Qualcomm) have products in this category.

Copilot+ systems run an enhanced version of Windows 11 with exclusive AI-driven features that include the following:

- **Improved Windows Search** (in preview): A more intuitive and efficient search function, delivering faster and more relevant results
- **Click to Do (in preview):** Simplifies task management by generating actionable items from activities, aiding in organization and efficiency
- **Recall (in preview):** Instantly locates previously viewed content on the PC, streamlining information retrieval
- **Super Resolution in Photos** (in preview): Enhances image quality by increasing resolution, making sharper and more detailed photos
- **Generative fill and erase in Paint** (in preview): Utilizes AI to add or remove elements within images, facilitating creative editing directly within the Paint application
- **Windows Studio Effects:** A suite of audio and video enhancements designed to improve the quality of video calls and recordings
- **Cocreator in Paint:** Lets you create artwork by entering text prompts and drawing in the Paint application
- **Live captions:** Automatically generates real-time captions for audio content, enhancing accessibility and comprehension
- **Automatic Super Resolution:** Automatically upscales images to higher resolutions, improving visual clarity without manual intervention

When deciding whether to purchase an AI PC with a <40 TOPS NPU or a >40 TOPS NPU, you must assess how employees will use these systems today and in the future. The key to doing this is understanding the road map of your key ISV partners.

Talking to Your ISVs

When incorporating AI PCs into your organization, it's crucial to understand how the software you rely on will leverage AI capabilities in the future. Today, ISVs are actively updating their road maps to integrate AI into their applications. Many of these new AI features will leverage local silicon on the PC instead of the cloud (or in combination with the cloud). Engaging with your ISVs helps ensure that your hardware investments align with their future offerings.

It's important to note that AMD, Intel, and Qualcomm all have different NPU architectures, and not all ISVs will map to all NPU hardware. Among the three vendors, Intel has the longest history of working with ISVs to bring new features to market, but all three insist they're working closely with partners to bring AI to their latest platforms quickly.

Schedule conversations with your ISVs to discuss their plans for incorporating AI. Questions to ask include the following:

- Which AI features are planned for upcoming releases, and will they be enabled out of the box?
- What will run locally, what will run in the cloud, and what might feature a hybrid cloud/local solution?
- Which silicon vendors' NPUs do they support and why?
- Will these features run on <40 TOPS NPU machines but offer higher performance on >40 TOPS NPU systems, or do they require the higher TOPS NPU?
- Are there additional minimum hardware specifications for their AI-enabled features, such as more system RAM?
- Will AI-enabled features be included in standard software licenses or require additional fees.
- Are there collaborative opportunities if your organization has unique requirements that warrant custom AI solutions?
- What control will IT have over how AI features are used and what data these features can ingest?
- Are there quantified productivity gains from using these AI features?
- Will enabling these AI features in an app demonstrably lower the number of security incidents?

Planning for the Future

It must be said that not every person in your company needs an AI PC. For many, a modern PC with faster silicon, more memory, enhanced security, and better collaboration features represents a sizeable and worthwhile upgrade.

The fact is, choosing the right PC today requires balancing current needs with future potential. AI is becoming a fundamental part of how we interact with technology, and its integration into the Windows ecosystem will only grow. When planning your PC purchases, consider the lifespan of the devices and the likelihood that future software and features will increasingly rely on some local AI capabilities.

Future proofing your investments is critical in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. While it may be tempting to wait and see with AI, prudent organizations are already piloting and deploying AI PCs. As the ecosystem rapidly advances in the next few years, new AI use cases will emerge. Those who have prepared will reap the benefits of AI-driven productivity gains for users, while those who have waited might see their competitors outpace them.

Moreover, with the growing competition among AMD, Intel, and Qualcomm, companies can benefit from a broader range of choices at varying prices. Evaluating the total cost of ownership — including performance, support, and compatibility with AI-driven workflows — will ensure a sound investment.

Upgrading from Windows 10 and investing in AI PCs involves more than choosing compatible hardware — it requires strategic planning and collaboration. By engaging with hardware providers, aligning with your ISVs, and future proofing your investments, you can build a technology ecosystem that meets today's needs and positions your organization for success in the years to come.

ADVICE FOR THE TECHNOLOGY BUYER

- **Evaluate your Windows PC fleet:** Assess your current installed base of Windows 10 PCs to determine which systems are eligible for a Windows 11 upgrade. If you still need to begin transitioning from Windows 10 to Windows 11, act quickly to ensure a smooth migration.
- **Plan for upgrades and replacements:** Identify which systems will be upgraded in place and which need replacement. Allocate budget for ESUs for devices that won't be replaced before October 2025 to ensure security compliance.
- **Engage with ISVs:** Meet with the ISVs that provide your critical business software to review their road map for integrating local AI features. Understand the hardware requirements needed to support these capabilities effectively.

- **Explore Microsoft's Copilot+ features:** Investigate the current and upcoming AI-driven features that Microsoft is adding to Copilot+ PCs. Track OS-level AI enhancements that could impact your employees' workflows and productivity.
- **Collaborate with partners:** Work with your trusted hardware and silicon partners to stay informed about the latest and upcoming technologies. Be prepared to adopt a mix of non-AI PCs, hardware-enabled AI PCs, and next-generation AI PCs to meet your organization's diverse needs.

LEARN MORE

Related Research

- *IDC's U.S. Commercial PCD Survey, 2024 — Windows 11 Migration Results* (IDC #US52705624, November 2024)
- *IDC's 2024 U.S. Commercial PCD Survey: Dollars and Cents*(IDC #US52705524, November 2024)
- *IDC's U.S. Commercial PCD Survey, 2024 — AI PC Results* (IDC #US52705424, November 2024)
- *Worldwide AI-Enabled PC Forecast, 2024-2028: 2Q24* (IDC #US52620924, September 2024)

Synopsis

This IDC Perspective explores challenges and opportunities for IT decision-makers as they prepare to address Microsoft's October 2025 Windows 10 end of service (EOS). It discusses the steps a company should take as it assesses its plans to refresh its Windows PC fleet, the importance of closely partnering with trusted hardware, silicon, and software partners, the new options available in the era of the AI PC, and the importance of planning for a future where AI becomes ever more ubiquitous.

"The October 2025 Windows 10 end of service has crept up on many companies who have been almost entirely focused on understanding and implementing AI in their business," says Tom Mainelli, group vice president, Devices and Consumer Research at IDC. "Now they're faced with making fast decisions around their fleet refresh and the role that the AI PC will play going forward. How they choose to proceed will have a lasting impact on their AI strategy for years to come."

ABOUT IDC

International Data Corporation (IDC) is the premier global provider of market intelligence, advisory services, and events for the information technology, telecommunications, and consumer technology markets. With more than 1,300 analysts worldwide, IDC offers global, regional, and local expertise on technology, IT benchmarking and sourcing, and industry opportunities and trends in over 110 countries. IDC's analysis and insight helps IT professionals, business executives, and the investment community to make fact-based technology decisions and to achieve their key business objectives. Founded in 1964, IDC is a wholly owned subsidiary of International Data Group (IDG, Inc.).

Global Headquarters

140 Kendrick Street
Building B
Needham, MA 02494
USA
508.872.8200
Twitter: @IDC
blogs.idc.com
www.idc.com

Copyright Notice

This IDC research document was published as part of an IDC continuous intelligence service, providing written research, analyst interactions, and web conference and conference event proceedings. Visit www.idc.com to learn more about IDC subscription and consulting services. To view a list of IDC offices worldwide, visit www.idc.com/about/worldwideoffices. Please contact IDC report sales at +1.508.988.7988 or www.idc.com/?modal=contact_repsales for information on applying the price of this document toward the purchase of an IDC service or for information on additional copies or web rights.

Copyright 2024 IDC. Reproduction is forbidden unless authorized. All rights reserved.