Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org.

QUESTION: I have Windows 7 Home Premium and want to run some of my old software that only runs under Windows XP, what are my choices?

PC CLUB: Before I answer this let me state that this article is not for beginners. Every once in a while I cover a topic like this, hoping to help at least a few readers including the one that submitted the question.

To use the Microsoft Windows Virtual PC software with Windows 7 you must have the Professional, Ultimate or Enterprise version. Fortunately, there are other options.

First of all, what does Virtual PC software do? It lets you run one operating system inside of another in sort of a special container. This container or virtual PC is isolated from your main operating system.

Let's review some of the reasons for running XP under Windows 7.
- There is the reason that you mentioned in your question.
- In my case, I teach a class where I have students that use several versions of Windows. I can quickly switch back and forth. This is an excellent solution for instructors.
- When you perform tasks with XP running inside of a virtual PC, you can be assured that any viruses or malware will be isolated inside of the virtual PC.
- If you want to experiment with Linux, you can install it in a Virtual PC without disrupting Windows 7.

If you have older software that you ran under Windows XP you can look it up on the Microsoft compatibility site at http://bit.ly/windows7compatibility to see if it will run under Windows 7.

Here's a list of the most popular programs for installing a virtual PC.
- VirtualBox at http://www.virtualbox.org/
- VMware Player at http://bit.ly/vmplayersite
- VMware Workstation at http://bit.ly/vmwaresite for $189 or $90 student
- Windows Virtual PC at http://www.microsoft.com/windows/virtual-pc/ . Read the requirements at http://bit.ly/vmrequirements

I've tried all of the programs and my favorite two are VMware Player and VMware Workstation. Both of these programs are easy to install on any version of Windows 7. The only proviso is that you must have a Windows XP installation CD. For Linux you can download the software from http://www.linuxsoftware.org/. Or better yet, just go to any book store and purchase a magazine on Linux that comes with a CD or DVD. VirtualBox is not a bad alternative.

VMware Player is free program that has all of the features you need to run a virtual PC with Windows XP or Linux. VMware Workstation, which is not free, has several additional features that are quite useful. For example, if you install Windows XP or any operating system you can take a snapshot. This allows you to make subsequent changes such as installing programs and then reverting to the snapshot to get back to where you started. This is handy for trying out programs, restoring an infected PC to its original state in seconds, etc. This software is available in in a trial version for evaluation.

Most of these programs have excellent documentation and I found the instructions for installation and usage easy to follow. I'd recommend having at least 2 megabytes of RAM installed. Another feature that you can try is to install more than one virtual machine including Windows XP and Vista or Linux. I've installed Windows XP and Windows Vista allowing me to demonstrate almost any E-mail program or Windows feature. I had to upgrade my Notebook to 3 megabytes of RAM to avoid a slowdown. I have the 32-bit version of Windows 7 installed which limits me to the 3 megabytes. Why don't I have the 64-bit version? That's another story.

Ed Schwartz is a member of the North Orange County Computer Club. To send in a question, go to edwardns.com and click the Contact Me menu. Archives of previous columns are also on the website.