Continued Drop in PC Shipments Slows

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NEW YORK (AP) — Worldwide shipments of PCs fell during the first three months of the year, but the latest numbers show that the global slump in PC demand may be easing.

Although the numbers released Wednesday by market research firms Gartner and IDC mark the industry's eighth straight quarter of declines, they also show a considerable slowdown from the drops in the fourth quarter of 2013.

Analysts for both firms pointed to a bump in demand, especially in Japan, stemming from Microsoft's retirement of its Windows XP operating system this week. Although users can still run the 12-year-old operating system, Microsoft will no longer provide security updates and has urged existing users to upgrade to newer systems, such as Windows 8.

Mikako Kitagawa, principal analyst at Gartner, said the PC professional market also improved in regions such as Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

According to Gartner, global PC shipments fell 2 percent to 76.6 million units in the first three months of 2014. By comparison, shipments fell 7 percent in the fourth quarter of 2013.

By IDC's calculations, shipments fell 4 percent in the first quarter, slightly less than the 5 percent drop the firm had projected.

PC sales have taken a hit in recent years amid the shift in consumer spending toward tablets and other mobile devices. They've also been hurt by tough economic conditions around the world.

Loren Loverde, IDC's vice president for worldwide PC trackers, said that although the global economy seems to be stabilizing, the move to mobile will likely continue.

"The net result remains consistent with our past forecasts — in particular, that there is potential for PC shipments to stabilize, but not much opportunity for growth," Loverde said in a statement.

The U.S. continued to be a bright spot for the industry.

Gartner said U.S. shipments rose 2 percent during the first quarter to 14.1 million, while IDC said U.S. shipments were unchanged at 14.3 million.

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