

The HCA “After Party”.

Three years ago, when I announced the closing down of HCA, I discussed a few things. First, I made it clear that I was the only developer of HCA itself, with the HCA cloud and the apps done by others. I also explained how I started this software with the intent that I would be the only user. It was a private project with no expectation of making it a product. Obviously, that changed. Finally, I wrote that my expectation was that other automation products would improve before HCA ended and HCA could be replaced by them. Well, I was wrong about that last point.

The HCA Cloud closed down at the end of December 2023, and was replaced by the Hubitat Cloud for voice control. However, all the really nice programmability facilities in HCA are just nowhere to be found in other applications. In my opinion, the programming functions and user interface in Alexa, Google Assistant, and Hubitat are terrible compared to HCA.

My goal remains to reduce the cost and the time I spend supporting HCA, but I never said that I would stop using my own software. I also expected to continue to make it available to my small circle of friends.

After receiving requests, I am announcing that I am willing to let others into that “circle of friends” if you wish to continue to use HCA. But it comes with some major changes.

First off, this isn’t a continuation of the same level of HCA support you have received up until now. I can’t guarantee that I will continue to make changes to HCA nor continue to generate new content for the library. But let’s look at what has happened over the last nearly three years of the shutdown period. I was there to answer your questions and have released updated versions of HCA. Also, there were many new additions to the library. I most likely will, but can’t guarantee, continue doing that for a while.

What’s certain is that I will not continue supporting the mobile apps. The Apple application has been taken over by an HCA user as my leaving the Apple developer program would have removed it from the Apple App Store. The Android application remains in the Android “Play” store. But if either app becomes non-operational due to operating system changes, or if a newly released mobile device has something that would require an update for the app to work, it will not be me resolving those issues. I have made it possible for others to take on the apps and make those fixes, but it will not be me.

Both Insteon and X10 will move to Legacy status. That means that the existing facilities in HCA for Insteon and X10 will stay exactly as they are. They will keep working as they do today, but I will not provide support for any questions about them, fix problems, or add additional support. Insteon has been the biggest problem for me over the years and it is dead to me as it should be to you.

So, what am I offering, and how do I make it worthwhile and manageable for me, and useful to you? Here is the plan for those who want to be in the “HCA Circle”.

1. Continued access to the HCA legacy website with a password needed to access. This gives you access to the library, User Guide and technical notes plus the Windows installer for whatever is the latest HCA version. If you are not yet on Version 18 when you join this, then you will immediately be given access to version 18 as part of this - no upgrade cost.

2. Continued access to all the existing and any new library packages by the same web-based method we now use.
3. Access to any new builds of HCA I make.
4. Answers to your questions emailed as before. At a slower pace than currently, but you will get answers.
5. Possible support for new hardware or new features with limitations. That means that if you have some new hardware you want supported into HCA or a feature idea, you can ask and I will consider it. If it looks useful to me and others, then support might be added. But this is not a guarantee. **Being in the circle doesn't make me your personal programmer.** Changes of any kind to HCA are at my discretion.
6. An understanding that my intention is to keep HCA working if something in the ecosystem surrounding it changes. For example, if Phillips Hue changes their API, I would probably respond to that as I have lots of Phillips Hue devices.

That's what you can expect, but what's on my side? To join the "HCA Circle" costs \$250 paid annually. It is for one calendar year, so I don't have to implement any sort of "subscription" service. I can just wipe everyone out of the database each January 1<sup>st</sup> and add you in when I receive payment.

Why am I charging for this? It makes a contract between us. I have always been very careful when users pay me money. If I accept it, then I am obligated to provide value in return. It tells me that you are serious and expressing real interest. It tells you that I'm accepting that I have an obligation to you.

So, what are your options with HCA? If you don't join on to this, then HCA will continue working for you as it does today unless something in the ecosystem surrounding HCA changes, as has been explained many times. But you will no longer have access to the library, user guide, or technical notes. It also means I will no longer offer you support and no longer answer your emails. You will not have access to anything new.

Are you taking a chance to become involved with this? Since it is clear I will not do this forever, at some point HCA will end. Maybe you should take the pain now and implement whatever can be accomplished using only Alexa, Google Assistant, or Hubitat. That's clearly a strategy I would understand.

For the foreseeable future, the plan for me and a few others was always to continue to use HCA. This is a way for you to come along too. What you do is up to you to decide.

Important: This plan does NOT start until August 1<sup>st</sup> 2024. Until then the usual HCA support continues.

(\*\*) Joining is for a calendar year, be it on January 1<sup>st</sup> or December 31<sup>st</sup>, its \$250. So, yes, it makes sense to join as close to the start of each year as possible. No, there is no half year discount for the remainder of 2024.

After this was announced I received a lot of questions. Here are the answers to questions you may already have:

**So, why are you doing this because I thought that you would be spending your time from now on in beachfront bars in Aruba?**

Actually, I do plan to do that but as I have written, I like programming and I like creating automation products. And I always planned to keep using HCA myself and helping those of my friends who do so.

**So why not just continue as before?**

I have no interest in that. Support is a lot of work. Creating and supporting software takes a lot of time and if it is a “product” then there are aspects of the software that must be maintained and improved that just aren’t fun.

**\$250 seems like a lot and is significantly more than in the past. Why that number?**

I have kept the price low for HCA over the years. Some would say it was too low but I chose to do that. This new level of cost will limit the number of people who participate and that’s a goal of mine. I do understand that some people have purchased the software over the years and used it successfully with zero questions or support from me. But there are others who required a level of support that was burdensome. I want to limit the number of casual users. I want to include those who have a real commitment to HCA and use many of its features.

**What will be available to those who don’t participate in this?**

As I have tried to say many times, there is no registration or time lock in the software anymore. You are free to continue to use it forever as is. I will make available zip files of the documentation and library files and you can, if you want, download those along with the most current installer of HCA 18. And then you are on your own. I will not answer support question emails after August 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.

**What are my risks if I don’t get involved in this?**

That is hard to answer. The biggest risk would be something changes around HCA. Windows stops running the software, or some change happens that breaks a key thing you need like the Hubitat to HCA connection. I doubt, but can’t guarantee, that either of those things will happen. It wouldn’t be an advantage for either of those companies to make changes that break existing users’ solutions, but it could happen. I do see a possible danger that Microsoft will continue to make it harder for programs to be installed outside of their app store. But given how much software exists I can’t see them totally preventing that.

Remember it is software and what works on one day will work on the next if the software isn’t changed. If you encounter a problem you will be on your own to resolve it. Many times I get support questions about things that turn out to be network problems, which by the way, I almost never can help with and the user finds the solution themselves. All you can do is to consider what issues you have had in the past and what I needed to help you resolve. Would have been able to solve whatever it was by yourself?

Again, someday this will all end. Take the pain today and move on or delay that for a while longer? Your decision.

**I have upgraded to HCA 18. Will I get updates to that after 1-August?**

Unless you become part of this program, no you will not. That was always the plan from when I announced this 2.5 years ago and you can read the plan and see I said exactly that when I announced the shutdown plan.

**What exactly are you guaranteeing to those that join this program?**

During the life of this software, I have made many changes. Some were made for market reasons. If you want to sell software it should do useful stuff for people and what is useful changes over time. I have also made changes for features I wanted. And there have been changes that came as requests from users. What changes will I make as part of this program? I really do not know so I am not making any guarantees. All I will do is to tell you to look at what has happened over the last years. I did make significant changes and probably will continue to do so but I can't make any promises. Since the software is off the market, I have no compelling reasons to make changes driven by market forces. If you are in this program, as I said in what I wrote, by taking someone's money I feel we have made a contract and I do honor that.

**I'm particularly concerned about the part when you said you will fix problems if they impact you but maybe not otherwise. Elaborate please.**

An example may help. I use Alexa support a lot and I know that many others do too. If something changed in the HCA Hubitat connection, I would fix that. HCA also supports IR interfaces, and I don't use any of those. If something changed in that support, and someone told me about it, would I fix it? It really would depend upon many things. How hard the fix would be? Do I have the hardware? Do I have the time? How important is it to your solution and are there other ways of doing it? I added that line about "personal programmer" because some users over the years really thought that is what I should be and I wasn't then and will not be now.

This program is really about "friends". I bake a lot of bread and give away some of what I make to friends. Sometimes I get requests from those friends for something and, if I can, I bake for them. HCA post August 1<sup>st</sup> will be like that. I always expected that those of my friends that use HCA would continue to have questions and problems and I will do my best, subject to my time and ability, to help them out.

If you have any questions about "open source" or selling it to someone else, please read what I wrote about this when the shutdown plan was announced. Those two options will not be happening.

**So you are asking me to "take a chance" that you will do stuff that I want or need?**

Yes, that is the case. I realize that this is a hard decision to make. I can fully understand that many HCA users will not want to get involved in this.

**Can I wait on this decision until I need to make it? That is, do nothing and join later if I have a reason to do so? How will I know if you created something really cool and would want that?**

I will stop the weekly emails after August 1<sup>st</sup>. How about this: As long as this "after party" exists, the main page of the HCA Legacy site will be available – password protected for all but the main page – and

I'll occasionally post info to that page about what has been happening. Please remember it will be \$250 per calendar year so doesn't matter if you join January 1<sup>st</sup> or December 31<sup>st</sup>.

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