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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!

Being that the holidays are upon us, this newsletter will be larger then normal to make room for a Poem (computer related) fit for the season, and other articles.

Our server, which hosts our SMMUG domain, is having technical difficulties. We are working on it and hope to have it back up and working this week.

How to fix what's wrong with Windows

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There's a major problem with Microsoft Windows that nobody seems to be doing anything about: It's not getting easier to use. And it should be.

While MS creeps slowly towards the release of the next Windows (aka Longhorn) sometime in 2005 or 2006, Apple keeps on cranking out new versions of Mac OS X.

I'm not talking about the baby steps that make Windows XP easier to use than Windows 98 and Windows 98 easier than Windows 95. I'm looking

for the kind of radical change that would make tomorrow's Windows as easy to use as Mac OS X.

No, this isn't another angry screed from a Mac user excoriating Windows for not being Macintosh. I'm simply saying that the biggest barrier to making computers really easy to use and ubiquitous is Microsoft Windows.

To change that, Microsoft needs to start with a clean slate.

IT BOTHERS ME when I hear Microsoft describing all the powerful new features that are supposed to show up whenever Longhorn, the next major Windows release , finally makes its appearance. Yes, a new file system should make it easier to find related pieces of information-- eventually. And, of course, I'm all for changing the programming model so programmers can think more about their applications and less about low-level plumbing.

But what I'd really like to see is Microsoft designing Longhorn to make home users and workers happier and more productive. I'd like to see the new operating system do a better job of anticipating user needs and offering solutions users didn't even know existed. I'd like to see a new, simpler interface that adapts itself to the way each of us works, by watching what we do every day and adjusting itself accordingly.

No, I don't know what this magical OS will look like, but I'd know it if I saw it. And note that this OS might be designed specifically for end-user machines, never to find its way onto a server. Note also that it may be time for Microsoft to reconsider its long-standing goal of having one OS that serves both home and office markets. Perhaps it's not such a good idea for all versions of Windows to be based on a single, unified code base.

Five or six years ago, back when we used to imagine that Microsoft had some hidden vulnerability, people used to ask me what I thought would become Microsoft's greatest challenge. Back then, I imagined that Microsoft might eventually face a rival operating system that had been born in the world of entertainment and consumer electronics devices,

migrating from there to desktop and portable PCs.

That may still happen--but I think Microsoft itself needs to build that radical Windows replacement.

ONE OF THE THINGS that would require: abandoning its slavish devotion to backward compatibility. Making sure that the OS still plays nice with older apps robs developers of the chance to truly innovate.

Microsoft could learn a lesson here from Steve Jobs--that you can occasionally hit the reset button by releasing a new OS that isn't compatible with everything that came before and live to tell about it. Apple has done so twice, with the original Mac (which rendered the Apple II obsolete) and then again with OS X (which relegated OS 9 to the scrap heap).

It's interesting that MS struggles to maintain all this backwards compatibility while releasing new operating systems that pretty much require new hardware. How many people really went down to CompUSA and bought shrink-wrapped copies of Windows XP to replace their old copies of Windows 98? According to people I talk to at Microsoft, not many. Unless your computer is fairly new, you've always been better off staying with your old OS on your old computer, upgrading only when you buy a newer, more powerful system.

With that new computer, you'd presumably get new applications, too. Backward compatibility is supposed to help out software vendors, who'd otherwise be forced to build new apps every time MS upgraded its OS; they'd also have to support multiple versions of their products for all the different operating systems.

BUT LET'S FACE IT : It's not like there are all that many big software companies left to be inconvenienced. The most important apps that would have to be compatible with a new Windows would be written by...Microsoft. Somehow, I think that could be arranged.

Sure, customers might have to purchase new versions of the applications

they used to run (assuming updated versions of said apps weren't included on the new PC). But we're talking about a once-a-decade phenomenon here, not something that would happen every year. There'd doubtless be point revisions in between; but those wouldn't be so drastic as to break compatibility with existing apps. One other advantage of that time frame: People could plan their transition from the old platform to the new one.

I don't have space enough here to do more than raise the issue and scratch its surface. But I believe the best way to really improve the experience of using a personal computer would be to give Microsoft's developers a clean slate to work from rather than requiring that the next release trace its ancestry all the way back to DOS and the original Windows.

I think we can do better. Certainly, Steve Jobs has shown us it's possible.

12-DAYS OF TECHNOLOGY BEFORE CHRISTMAS

On the first day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
A database with a broken b-tree (what the hell is a b-tree anyway?)

On the second day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Two transceiver failures (CRC errors? Collisions? What is going on?)
And a database with a broken b-tree (Rebuild WHAT? It's a 10GB database!)

On the third day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Three French users (who, of course, think they know everything)
Two transceiver failures (which are now spewing packets all over the net) and a database with a broken b-tree (Backup? What backup?)

On the fourth day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Four calls for support (playing the same Christmas song over and over)
Three French users (Why do they like to argue so much over trivial things?)
Two transceiver failures (How the hell do I know which ones they are?)
And a database with a broken b-tree (Pointer error? What a pointer error?)

On the fifth day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Five golden SCSI contacts (Of course they're better than silver!)
Four support calls (Ever notice how time stands still when on hold?
Three French users (No, we don't have foot pedals on PC's? Why do you ask?)
Two transceiver failures (If I knew which were bad, I would know which to fix!) And a database with a broken b-tree (Not till next week? Are you nuts?!?!)

On the sixth day of Christmas, technology gave to me:

Six games a-playing (On the production network, of course!)
Five golden SCSI contacts (What do you mean "not terminated!")
Four support calls (No, don't transfer me again - do you HEAR? Damn!)
Three French users (No, you cannot scan in by putting the page to the screen..)
Two transceiver failures (I can't look at the LEDs - they're in the ceiling!)
And a database with a broken b-tree (Norway? That's where this was written?)

On the seventh day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Seven license failures (Expired? When?)
Six games a-playing (Please stop tying up the PBX to talk to each other!)
Five golden SCSI contacts (What do you mean I need "wide" SCSI?)
Four support calls (At least the musak is different this time...)
Three French Users (Well, monsieur, there really isn't an "any" key, but...)
Two transceiver failures (SQE? What is that? If I knew I would set it myself!)
And a database with a broken b-tree (No, I really need to talk to Lars - NOW!)

On the eighth day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Eight MODEMs dialing (Who bought these? They're a security violation!)
Seven license failures (How many WEEKS to get a license?)
Six games a-playing (What do you mean one pixel per packet on updates?!?)
Five golden SCSI contacts (Fast SCSI? It's supposed to be fast, isn't it?)
Four support calls (I already told them that! Don't transfer me back - DAMN!)
Three French users (No, CTL-ALT-DEL is not the proper way to end a program)
Two transceiver failures (What do you mean "babbling transceiver"?)
And a database with a broken b-tree (Does anyone speak English in Oslo?)

On the ninth day of Christmas, technology gave to me:

Nine lady executives with attitude (She said do WHAT with the servers?)
Eight MODEMs dialing (You've been downloading WHAT?)
Seven license failures (We sent the P.O. two months ago!)
Six games a-playing (HOW many people are doing this to the network?)
Five golden SCSI contacts (What do you mean two have the same ID?)
Four support calls (No, I am not at the console - I tried that already.)
Three French users (No, only one floppy fits at a time? Why do you ask?)
Two transceiver failures (Spare? What spare?)
And a database with a broken b-tree (No, I am trying to find Lars! L-A-R-S!)

On the tenth day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Ten SNMP alerts flashing (What is that Godawful beeping?)
Nine lady executives with attitude (No, it used to be a mens room? Why?)
Eight MODEMs dialing (What Internet provider? We don't allow Internet here!)
Seven license failures (SPA? Why are they calling us?)
Six games a-playing (No, you don't need a graphics accelerator for Lotus!)
Five golden SCSI contacts (You mean I need ANOTHER cable?)
Four support calls (No, I never needed an account number before...)
Three French users (When the PC sounds like a cat, it's a head crash!)
Two transceiver failures (Power connection? What power connection?)
And a database with a broken b-tree (Restore what index pointers?)

On the eleventh day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Eleven boards a-frying (What is that terrible smell?)
Ten SNMP alerts flashing (What's a MIB, anyway? What's an extension?)
Nine lady executives with attitude (Mauve? Our computer room tiles in mauve?)
Eight MODEMs dialing (What do you mean you let your roommate dial-in?)
Seven license failures (How many other illegal copies do we have?!?!)
Six games a-playing (I told you - AFTER HOURS!)
Five golden SCSI contacts (If I knew what was wrong, I wouldn't be calling!)

Four support calls (Put me on hold again and I will slash your credit rating!)
Three French users (Don't hang your floppies with a magnet again!)
Two transceiver failures (How should I know if the connector is bad?)
And a database with a broken b-tree (I already did all of that!)

On the twelfth day of Christmas, technology gave to me:
Twelve virtual pipe connections (There's only supposed to be two!)
Eleven boards a-frying (What a surge suppresor supposed to do, anyway?)
Ten SNMP alerts flashing (From a distance, it does kinda look like Xmas lights.)
Nine lady executives with attitude (What do you mean aerobics before backups?)
Eight MODEMs dialing (No, we never use them to connect during business hours.)
Seven license failures (We're all going to jail, I just know it.)
Six games a-playing (No, no - my turn, my turn!)
Five golden SCSI contacts (Great, just great! Now it won't even boot!)
Four support calls (I don't have that package! How did I end up with you!)
Three French users (I don't care if it is sexy, no more nude screen backgrounds!)
Two transceiver failures (Maybe we should switch to token ring...)
And a database with a broken b-tree (No, operator - Oslo, Norway. We were just talking and were cut off...)

Origin: Written by Dr. Bill Hancock, of Network-1 Software and Technology.

Hope everyone enjoys the Holidays, see you next Year !!   ☺

Next SMMUG meeting is January 12, 2004