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Is Windows past its prime?

By Jim Carroll



My Windows XP computer and I have been together about four years. It works quite well, and we've developed a nice, stable relationship. Actually, I've been faithful to Windows since Microsoft 3.1, which was released back in 1992.

Yet, there are dark clouds on the horizon. Early media reports about Microsoft Windows Vista indicate the new operating system might be presenting some challenges in terms of usability and complexity. Well, let's just say the early reviews have been scathing.

I find myself gravitating to the Apple site to watch the latest ads featuring Mac and PC. You've probably seen them — the PC guy is in a suit and seems to have quite a bit go wrong with his Vista system. The Mac guy is dressed casually and is obviously meant to be cool. His life seems uncomplicated; his Mac just works. OK, I know it's a commercial, but the message is compelling.

I also find myself spending less time on Windows-oriented stuff and doing more through my Web browser. For example, I now manage all my e-mail through Google Mail, which, despite some frustrations at the start, now seems intuitive and quite prepared to work with me. I can access it anywhere I go, from any Web browser. And the folks at Google have even come up with a fancy little e-mail program that lets me directly access Gmail on my BlackBerry.

To keep my schedule (and my sanity) intact, I've moved from Outlook to Google Calendar. It, too, is accessible with any browser and is nicely integrated with Gmail. You know those meeting-notice messages, which, when you click on one, automatically enters the meeting into your Outlook calendar? You can do that with Gmail/Calendar as well. And a program called GCalSync keeps the calendar on my BlackBerry up to date with my Google Calendar.

Then there is my server network: five Linux Ubuntu servers in my basement. They automatically and silently oversee a huge variety of services, from weeding spam out of my e-mail before sending it on to my BlackBerry; automatically cruising the Net looking for information on topics of interest to me (innovation, creativity, trends) and organizing it into a cool program called Gregarius; running the MovableType software, which keeps my blog up to date; undertaking automatic backups of my own, my wife's and my sons' data files, among other stuff.

This brings me back to Microsoft Vista and the so-called upgrades that come with Microsoft Office. I've been using Microsoft Word and Powerpoint for about a decade; I can count on one hand the number of features I use. The media reports suggest there is a big learning curve with the new versions, and quite simply, I don't relish the thought of migrating up to some new, more complex Word program. Instead, I'm starting to play around with Google Docs and Spreadsheets. I've got very simple requirements, and maybe I don't need a complex solution.

Which makes me wonder: is Windows past its prime? I often talk about how my sons (12 and 14) describe a variety of things around our home as being from the "olden days." This list includes 35mm film, paper cheques, TV guides and other items they just don't understand, see or use.

Is Windows set to develop a reputation of being from the olden days? I can do more without using Windows; Apple seems to be keeping one step ahead of Microsoft without the same \$5-billion, five-year investment that went into Vista. I'm wondering if Microsoft has become so big and bloated that the efficiency of its operating system now resembles that of its organizational structure. And I keep going back to the Apple site to watch those Mac/PC ads. I'm torn.

WEB ALTERNATIVES TO WINDOWS

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Gregarius <http://gregarius.net>
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