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NICE to Be Sure

Written by **Rick Wolfe**

This article presents an overview of the NEXTSTEP Intel Compatibility Expert (NICE) Testing Program.

(Note that sidebars and marginal notes in the printed journal are denoted here by smaller type with bars above and below the item.)

As NEXTSTEP has grown more popular, customers have wanted to install it on a greater variety of computers. If they choose one of the many Intel-based PCs, they have generally turned to a NEXTSTEP certi®ed system, tested by NeXT as thoroughly compatible.

In December 1994, NeXT SQA (software quality assurance) engineers put together a plan for teaching third parties how to test their systems for NEXTSTEP compatibility. This program produces NEXTSTEP Intel Compatibility Experts, NICE people to have around. NICE people produce speci®c Intel-based PC con®gurations that have been tested for compatibility with NEXTSTEP.

NICE BENEFITS

The NICE program presents benefits for vendors, developers, testers, and NeXT itself.

Vendors, developers, and testers benefit from the ability to test their products for compatibility with NEXTSTEP by themselves with only minimal involvement from NeXT.

NeXT's greatest benefit from this program is that customers wanting to purchase systems that run NEXTSTEP will have a list of Intel-based PC systems that have been tested for compatibility with NEXTSTEP. Customers need to have a high confidence level that the system they are purchasing is going to run NEXTSTEP. The listing of Tested Compatible systems on NeXT's World Wide Web site will give them a reference to systems that have been tested for compatibility and the confidence that they are buying the right system.

Everyone benefits from the increased contact. One-on-one contact between NeXT engineers and NICE engineers promotes better understanding and smoother adjustment as systems improve. Vendors who have joined the NICE program can take advantage of NeXT's beta releases. NeXT gets advance notice of system changes, and NICE sites can learn of any potential difficulties NeXT has discovered in new hardware. Manufacturers, developers, and customers can have NICE-trained staff on site.

Hardware vendors benefit from increased visibility and extensive tests. By getting their computer systems listed in the *NEXTSTEP Hardware Compatibility Guide*, hardware vendors are advertising the capability of their systems to run NEXTSTEP. Running NEXTSTEP and the Compatibility Test Suite on a system will stress it in ways that testing with a single-tasking operating system cannot. This may help find bugs and other hardware problems that might otherwise be missed.

All large NEXTSTEP sites have a variety of computer systems. In many cases these include systems from NeXT's list of certified systems as well as systems that have never been tested formally with NEXTSTEP. The NICE test suite provides a convenient way to test systems quickly for local deployment.

TRAINING CLASSES

To become a NICE test engineer, you must take the training class. The prerequisites are a knowledge of Intel-based hardware and the ability to install and configure NEXTSTEP on an Intel-based PC system. Classes run three days, either at NeXT's offices or off-site.

Upon completion of the program, the NICE graduate receives NeXT's Compatibility Test Suite to use in testing systems for NEXTSTEP compatibility.

For information on registering for NICE training, call NeXT's Telesales department at 800-848-NeXT.

NICE CLASS AT A GLANCE

Purpose: Train engineers and technicians how to use the Compatibility Test Suite to test an Intel-based PC for NEXTSTEP compatibility.

For: Intel system vendors, adaptor vendors, device driver developers, NeXT customers, system integrators, and third-party test labs who want to develop their own testing program.

Requirements: Candidates must successfully pass the three-day class taught by NeXT.

Result: Candidate is registered and provided with Compatibility Test Suite.

Information: NeXTanswer 1903, NeXT Telesales.

COMPATIBILITY TESTING

NICE test engineers use the Compatibility Test Suite to test complete hardware configurations for NEXTSTEP compatibility. The system under test is a specific PC system fully fitted with expansion cards and other specific peripherals using device drivers that have

passed the NeXT testing process for device drivers. The Compatibility Test Suite reports the degree to which the speci@c con@guration tested is compatible with a given version of NEXTSTEP.

The NICE testing engineers submit a full description of the con@guration under test along with the test results to the NeXT SQA department for review. SQA audits the test results and system descriptions for completeness. Compatibility is assessed based on the pass/fail indications provided by the NICE test engineer.

If the submitted test results pass SQA review, NeXT creates an authorization letter for the party submitting the test results. Once the authorization has been signed by both parties, NeXT sends the "Tested Compatible" logo artwork to the company sponsoring the NICE test, which may then af@x the logo for the speci@cally authorized con@guration. For every system tested compatible, NeXT will include information in the *Intel Certi@d and Compatibility Systems Guide*. The amount of detail made available will be determined by NeXT and by the party submitting the compatibility test report.

NeXT assumes no support responsibilities for any "Tested Compatible" product tested by NICE third-party engineers. All support issues and responsibilities belong solely to the hardware vendor or integrator that submitted the test report.

NEXT TESTING PROGRAMS

NeXT maintains three testing programs:

- The Tested with NEXTSTEP program tests peripheral equipment and device drivers for compatibility with a particular version of NEXTSTEP.

F0.eps ,

Purpose: Test peripherals and their device drivers for NEXTSTEP compatibility.

For: PC adaptor vendors and device driver developers.

Tests done by: NeXT SQA at NeXT.

Tests certify: Device and device driver configurations work with a particular version of NEXTSTEP.

Result: NeXT issues an authorization letter and ^aTested with NEXTSTEP^o logo for packaging.

Support: Vendor of tested product provides support.

Information: NeXTanswer 1902, NeXT Product Marketing.

· The Tested Compatible program tests specific PC configurations for working compatibility with a particular version of NEXTSTEP.

F2.eps ,

Purpose: Test a particular configuration of a PC for working compatibility with NEXTSTEP.

For: Intel system vendors, adaptor vendors, device driver developers, NeXT customers, system integrators, and third-party test labs. ^aTested Compatible^o is a prerequisite for a system to be considered for the ^aNeXT Certified^o program.

Tests done by: Any NICE qualified test engineers on their premises or by NeXT SQA at NeXT.

Tests certify: Particular system configuration works with a particular version of NEXTSTEP.

Result: NeXT issues an authorization letter and ^aTested Compatible^o logo for that system.

Support: Vendor of tested system and/or organization that performed testing provides support.

Information: NeXTanswer 1903, NeXT Telesales.

· The NeXT Certi®ed program tests a speci®c PC con®guration for rigorous compatibility with a particular version of NEXTSTEP.

NeXT can deliver the highest level of support to customers who use certi®ed systems because of the ongoing availability of information on these systems.

F1.eps ,

Purpose: Test a system that is already Tested Compatible for thorough compatibility with NEXTSTEP. NeXT guarantees that subsequent versions of NEXTSTEP will retain compatibility for one year after certification.

For: System integrators and vendors of Intel-based PCs.

Tests done by: NeXT SQA at NeXT.

Tests certify: Particular system configuration works with a particular version of NEXTSTEP.

Result: NeXT issues an authorization letter and ^aNeXT Certified^o logo for packaging.

Support: NeXT provides free installation support within 30 days of purchase.

Information: NeXTanswer 1904, NeXT Telesales.

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^aTESTED COMPATIBLE^o AT A GLANCE