

Some Final Thoughts on Microsoft and First Thoughts About Holiday Giving

Ramblings by Michael Dortch

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Well, all it takes is a little whining and Microsoft as a topic to raise the level of discussion. Compare the following to the mail I quoted in my first column about Microsoft just two issues of "Ambrosia Times" ago!

"I'm just so tired of Microslop's monolithic presence in almost everything that I care about. I feel that Bill the Devil's greatest contribution to humanity is that he made PCs more Mac-like, but the disservice of mediocrity and monopoly outdoes this tiny bit of almost-good (as does the illusion that Apple is gone and Microsoft rules the entire empire so there's no point in buying a Mac). I turned on my car radio today, only to hear Rush Limbaugh praising Bill Gates! So, a cautionary note to you might be that you consider the company you keep..."
-- A reader of my past two Ambrosia Times "Ramblings" who requested anonymity.

"I don't even care what he has to say. I just wanna sit up close 'cause he's got so much MONEY!"
-- A woman attending a recent keynote speech by Bill Gates, and a woman whom is mercifully anonymous to me.

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"I read through many of the newsgroups out there on Usenet, many of them with Apple's products. It's funny to see those little article titles saying something like "Microsoft Sucks" or "Apple's going down!" It's very entertaining that many people treat their choice of computer platform as the basis for "American's Holy War", so speak. Furthermore, the level of intelligence of such articles is proof enough that one need not have the brains of a carrot in order to navigate the 'net. Actually, I have several over-ripefruit-based products behind me wanting to check their e-mail right now.
Hmmm...
-- A university senior and "die-hard Mac user" whom I'm keeping anonymous to protect him from his apparent computer-mates.

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"In your article, you mentioned that Microsoft has made more millionaires than any other company, although you failed to mention that none of them came from the

Computer company, the company that Bill Gates had scammed at the beginning of

'career.' While I may not be a licensed psychologist, it would seem to me that what has driven Bill Gates is his need for control. It is also my opinion that Bill Gates' interviews are as believable as a [Road] Runner cartoon."

-- another anonymous Ambrosia Times "Ramblings" reader, who felt compelled to respond but originally had it "Rhode Runner" for some reason ...

You know, for better or worse, I think we'll have Microsoft to kick around for a while yet. But on the other hand, in a lot of other industries which have proven fundamental to the national and/or world economy, a lot of the original entrepreneurs and companies eventually fail and fade. And if we really are all running on Internet/Web/computer-industry time, Bill's fifteen minutes may already be more than two-thirds up. I don't think that's true, but it is interesting to consider ...

Meanwhile, the end-of-calendar-year "holidaze" approach (he said as ecumenically, inclusively and politically correctly as he could muster). And here's my suggestion for a perfect gift.

Somewhere near you, there's a school, library and/or non-profit organization which needs a computer, software, a modem and some form of Internet/Web access. The cool thing about the Web is that a computer you might want to throw away is perfectly fine if it will run a browser and support the fastest available modem. Also, if a computer's too expensive a gift, you could buy a "network computer," a Web-enabled TV or even the Sega Saturn game system with its new modem and other add-ons for Web access.

Whatever you decide to give, three criteria are fundamental. First, it must come with the software, hardware and access necessary to allow getting online no more than an hour after unpacking the box. Second, your gift must include enough time from you and yours to actually take the gift to the receiving organization, set it up and make it work. Third, you must include the commitment to check in from time to time to make sure everything's working and being used by its intended beneficiaries.

And remember the little things. If you include shareware, pay the registration fee and show the receiving organization as owner. Ditto for all product registration and warranty cards.

Also, remember that you don't have to do this alone. Get together with your kids or friends and pool some of that trick-or-treat money. Cash in those gift certificates from the Cotton Ball Boutique or wherever your clueless out-of-town relatives shop. Do something radical like have a neighborhood garage sale or bake sale. (Yes, with your neighbors!) Tell your favorite local bands to donate proceeds from some upcoming gigs or recordings.

Do something. Directly. If technology's not accessible to everyone, it's not really as valuable as it could or should be to anyone. And even us little ol' individuals can make a difference. Happy Holidays!

Ed Note -- Michael Dortch has written, talked and thought about new technologies and their effects on people and businesses for about 20 years. He is based in San Francisco, and welcomes comments at medortch@aol.com.