

California Computer Care

News,
Views,
Tips and
Cool Techniques
for CCC Members

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We
speak
Geek,
so you
don't
have to.

Well, it's over... ...sorta

The Microsoft trial is done; until the appeal, of course. The US Department of Justice will probably try to fast-track the appeal to the US Supreme Court and if they are successful, the final, final word may be written as early as January, 2001.

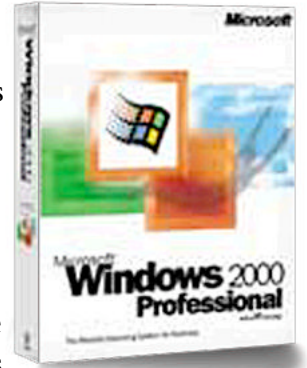
As reported in the December, 1999 CCC Newsletter (reprint available on request), Microsoft was found guilty of abusing its monopoly power. Now, Judge Jackson has decreed the penalty for this criminal behavior. Microsoft is to be broken into two companies that must act independently of one another. Microsoft #1 will continue to make the various Windows operating systems and Microsoft #2 will make the various application programs (Word, Excel, Internet Explorer, etc.).

Microsoft's reaction to this is twofold (and absolutely predictable). First, they claim that they did nothing wrong and will, of course, appeal the decision. Secondly, they propose that instead of the break up, they will modify the way they do business and be nicer (even though they, of course, did nothing wrong in the first place, you big (sob) Department of Justice bully!).

The joke here is that Microsoft proposes that they *now* do, to avoid the break up, what they *agreed* to do almost three years ago, but, arrogantly, never actually did. Judge Jackson's response was that they have clearly shown that they can't be trusted to do what they promise and that the break up is the only solution left. So, what happens if Microsoft loses the appeal?

The optimistic view is that once the operating system arm of Microsoft cannot use the Application Company to design programs like

Word and Excel to work properly only with Windows, the Application Company will be able to create properly functioning versions of their software that will work with other PC operating systems like Linux, Be, OS2, Geo and others. This will allow users to choose other, better operating systems and still use the same software applications.



On the OS side, the Operating System Company, because it will have to compete with better products, will be forced to improve Windows so that it works better and requires less time and money from the user.

We Mac users may benefit, too. Right now, the only Microsoft applications that we can buy and use are ones like Word and Excel that were Macintosh programs before they were Windows programs. After the break up, the Applications Company will have no reason not to want to sell us Access, Outlook (not Outlook Express) or Publisher; heck, our money is as green as anyone's. But. . .

There's a pessimistic view, too. If the above scenario occurs and Microsoft responds successfully to these challenges, it may end up as TWO vast monopolies that dominate everything even more completely that one monopoly does today.

I'm willing to take the chance. I think that this ruling will do more good than harm. If Microsoft gets a lesson in humility and stops taking its customers for granted, we'll all profit. Uh, I hope!

Microsoft humor

Microsoft is a great source for humor though they don't realize it themselves. Just look at Bill Gates' response to the break up ruling*:

“Two years ago I said that we would vigorously defend a principle that is critical to both consumers and the future of the high-tech industry—the right of every company to innovate and improve its products.¹ Today we move forward to protect this principle and maintain our commitment to innovation.”²

“Consumers know that healthy competition in the software industry is delivering great products, low prices and rapid innovation,” Gates said.³ ‘And consumers know that Microsoft’s efforts to drive the Windows® platform forward have helped to make personal computers easier to use and more versatile,’ Gates added.”⁴

This is absurdist humor at it's finest! The following notes will show you why. Have a good chuckle on Mr. Gates and his wacky pals.

* Go to http://www.microsoft.com/freedomtoinnovate/fin_page2.htm for the full text of the statement.

California Computer Care
P.O. Box 9445
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
(800) 540-8989

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Notes:

- 1) You can accuse Microsoft of lots of things, but innovation isn't among them. Every major MS product, from MSDOS to Internet Explorer was either bought from someone else or a copy of an existing product owned by another company. In some cases, they have stolen the software from it's owner and sold it, under their own name, as their own. When caught, they have either bought the creator outright (Stacker) or paid the owner off under a non-disclosure agreement (QuickTime [why *did* you think Microsoft gave Apple 150 million dollars a few years ago?]).
- 2) As long as somebody else does the work!
- 3) Yes, consumers do know this, but where is the competition? Quick! Name the competition to Microsoft Word? Who makes a product like Excel? Who removes Windows from their PC (98% of the market) and installs the second most popular choice, OS2 (less than .5% of the market)?
- 4) As humorist Douglas Adams has so rightly said: “*The idea that Bill Gates has appeared like a knight in shining*

armour to lead all customers out of a mire of technological chaos neatly ignores the fact that it was he who, by peddling second-rate technology, led them into it in the first place.”

June Tip—

Have you ever printed out a web page and gotten something that would fit on a postage stamp? Then you are using Netscape Navigator and an Epson printer. Here's how you fix it:

- 1) Open Netscape Navigator.
- 2) From the File menu, choose Page Setup...
- 3) At the bottom of the Page Setup window, you will see a checked, check box labelled: Fit to page if possible.
- 4) Uncheck this box.
- 5) Click the OK button and print. Now, your web page prints properly.

This happens because the person who designed the web page didn't specify how big it is. When Navigator sees the page, it thinks that it is huge. The Epson software then prints the web page and all of that extra space on one page of paper.