

California Computer Care

News,
Views,
Tips and
Cool Techniques
for CCC Members

January 2004
Vol. VII, No. 1

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

Microsoft Mayhem

Note: It has been quite a long time since my last “*Microsoft is the Devil*” rant, so please indulge me as I mouth off again.

Our friends in Redmond, Washington have been busy (and that’s always scary). Here’s a little of what they’ve been up to.

VirtualPC. *VirtualPC* is an amazing software *tour de force* that fools the Windows operating system and Windows software into thinking that a Mac is a PC. With *VirtualPC*, a good, fast Mac can run almost any Windows software. Microsoft bought *VirtualPC* from its inventor and developer Connectix. Previously, Connectix sold several versions of *VirtualPC*. This allowed the user to pick the one that ran best for them. Microsoft’s first act was to withdraw all versions but the most expensive and hardest to run (there were seven, now there are four). Next, it released an upgrade (6.1) that is very buggy and slow. Microsoft’s tech support is poor compared to Connectix’s. Overall, a great loss of value. (Also, *VirtualPC* will not run on the new Power Mac G5 though the recently announced VPC 7 upgrade *might do so* later this year.)

Internet Explorer. Microsoft has finally reached its goal of making Netscape’s web browsers hopelessly obsolete. Far too many web sites are now actively hostile to Netscape browsers and Netscape lacks the resources to deliver an effective response. To celebrate this milestone, in removing choice from the marketplace, Microsoft has announced that it is killing *Internet Explorer*. That’s right, after destroying *Internet Explorer*’s only real, cross-platform competitor, Microsoft is killing its own product and *NOT* replacing it with anything!

What are they thinking? Microsoft’s strategy here is two-fold:

One: With Microsoft’s next Windows up-

grade (code named *Longhorn*) Microsoft will roll *Internet Explorer*’s functions into its operating system. This will force *Windows* users to buy a new copy of *Windows* whenever they need to upgrade their web browser! Brilliant! Instead of giving away *Internet Explorer* for free, Microsoft guarantees that *Windows* users will have to buy an expensive upgrade on a regular basis or lose the ability to access the World Wide Web.

Two. Microsoft was very angry when Apple released its *Safari* web browser. Not only is *Safari* better than *Internet Explorer*; it is free and included with every Mac. So, by also killing the Mac version of *Internet Explorer*, Microsoft is gambling that it can force so many internet web sites to adopt proprietary Microsoft technologies that Apple will not be able to keep *Safari* compatible. When enough web sites are corrupted away from neutral, international standards to the Microsoft way, all computer users will have to switch to the latest Microsoft *Windows* to use the internet. The implications are obvious and ominous.

On my desk sits a class action lawsuit settlement that Microsoft made with the State of California. In the settlement, Microsoft is being punished for overcharging for their products and forcing their products upon unwilling users. \$1.1 billion will be refunded (in the form of vouchers) to customers who bought Microsoft Windows products IF they fill out forms and apply for the refund. Unfortunately, Microsoft’s Mac products are ineligible. Unclaimed funds will be divided. Two thirds will go to California schools and the other third will *go back to Microsoft!* Why doesn’t all of the unclaimed money go to schools?

Got a Microsoft support contract? Recent changes have made that contract nearly worthless. Microsoft-certified support techs

pay Microsoft for the right to access important help information from Microsoft's privileged support databases (TechNet). PBS' Robert X. Cringely recently reported*: "Not that long ago, if you bought a support contract from Microsoft, the support technician pretty much used TechNet to help you when you called in a problem. What you got for your money was someone to type in the query for you and read you the answers. Now TechNet is useless, [because queries sent to it return no or useless information] and if you access support information from Microsoft's public web site you will find almost no useful information. Important problems and answers are not available for free anymore. But Microsoft isn't just making it hard for the small, independent contractor. The big outsourcing firms have similar problems. Even though they buy the expensive support contracts, there are times when even these big companies like IBM and Accenture can't register problems on their customer's behalf.

*Natural Deselection: *Not Even Microsoft Will Last Forever, but They Plan to Try*, November 20, 2003.
<http://www.pbs.org/cringely/pulpit/pulpit20031120.html>

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

Like an
auto club
for your
computer.

Both the outsourcing firm AND the customer must have a support contract and register the problem before Microsoft will help. You have to pay twice to get help once."

"Curses! Caught again!" Bill might have said last month as Microsoft was once more found guilty of stealing technology from another company.

A federal jury awarded SPX Corp. \$62.3 million dollars in a patent infringement lawsuit. Microsoft was found guilty of stealing SPX's conferencing technology and adding it to several Microsoft products. As has happened many times in the past (why don't these companies learn?), Microsoft offered to partner with SPX's Imagexpo division to buy access to its whiteboard technology. After getting a full, behind-the-scenes demonstration of the software and learning how it works, Microsoft became suddenly disinterested in it and cancelled the forthcoming partnership. Soon after, Microsoft's products sprouted this same technology (you know, the technology they weren't interested in), accomplished using the same underlying software that SPX developed. Microsoft claims that it came to its whiteboard functions by coinci-

dentally identical software code. The jury didn't think so, and Microsoft hasn't appealed (I guess they thought that they got off cheap).

That's not all, but that's all the space I have. So, thanks for your tolerance. I feel much better now.

January Tip—

Your Mac just crashed! Do this:

- 1) If you can, Shut Down your Mac for a couple of minutes and start up again. Usually, all will be well.
- 2) If your Mac is locked up tight and will not respond to regular commands, do a Forced Quit. Hold down the Control (ctrl), Option and Apple (Command) keys. While you hold them, type the Escape (esc) key once. A window should pop up asking if you want to Force Quit the offending application. Click the Force Quit button. When back at the Finder, do a Shut Down as described above.
- 3) If Force Quit doesn't work, do a forced Shut Down. On all newer Macs, a Forced Shut Down is done by holding the power button in for five seconds.