
From: Ben Slivka
Sent: Sunday, October 26, 1997 9:10 PM
To: Bill Gates
Subject: RE: Last email

That's OK, thank you for apologizing. Cleverly, I read this apology before your first e-mail, so that took the sting away. :-)

However, I continue to believe we need to do some aggressive, retreat-like thinking about our technology future. You say you know what our top challenges are -- it would be great for you to lay them out in front of the top 50-100 technical folks to make sure we're all on the same wavelength. I bet you might inspire a few people to try and solve the problems you describe. And I also bet you'll get feedback on why you are on drugs in some areas and there are other problems you're missing altogether. This communication would be great...it seems to be totally missing at present. I haven't seen a strategy memo from you since the fall of 1995 when we did Internet Strategy day. Maybe I'm just out of the loop, though?

I'm really sorry I didn't push harder to have a Java review with you early this year. The lack of communication between you and me and my team created a lot of unnecessary stress/tension. It's an example of how *not* to run our business. You mentioned when we spoke 2 weeks ago that you felt like you couldn't send mail directly to miketout (re: his response that you can call Win32 API directly from Java) because you feared it would distract/randomize/etc. people. Please let me assure you that your mail to me, no matter how rude/brusk/etc., will not have a randomizing effect. I've been at MS 12+ years now, and I could easily retire. But, I like building stuff. I like building software. And MS is the place to do it. We've learned some pretty unhealthy management techniques, and I'm going to spend a fair bit of time over the next year trying to unwind those. It won't be easy, but someone has to do it. No one else seems to have the energy or the faith (or the stupidity?) to engage aggressively on this. But, for me, it's easy. I don't have any career aspirations. I don't mind (very much) what other people think of me. I can look back on the empowerment I experienced creating Internet Explorer, draw strength from that, and persevere.

At the risk of offending you again, let me tell you that I've spent the last week **trying** to install Small Business Server on a brand-new Gateway 2000 Pentium II, 300MHz machine. NT 4 setup is -- if you'll pardon my expression -- a piece of doo-doo. It's a great thing we've got a lot of solution providers and VARs -- setup for this thing is highly opaque.

I had NT 4 *workstation* preinstalled on my machine from Gateway. SBS wanted to install NT 4 *server*, and did *not* migrate any of my settings. Worse, I had a 3rd-party IDE driver for my hard disk, and NT 4 has a known bug that it doesn't propagate that driver when reinstalling. Furthermore, it doesn't appear to propagate *any* settings. And then it asks me all sorts of obscure questions about my network configuration. And do I have a DHCP server? Yikes.

I'll continue to get hand-holding from the SBS/NT team until I've got a domain registered, SQL server & Exchange & etc. set up. But to me, right now, SBS looks like a PSS nightmare.

My point about doing at least a prototype of a home computer OS is that there are fundamental design decisions (dating to 1989, and earlier -- really the 1960s and UNIX/VMS) riddled throughout NT (and Win95) that make these very fragile propositions for large-scale consumer adoption:

- 1) Error messages -- we should assume that every device is either connected, or connectible, to the Internet. Then, instead of "driver not found", etc., we could just connect and fetch the darned thing.
- 2) Memory corruption -- NT is our "industrial strength OS", but with NT 4 video drivers are at Ring 0, along with lots of other 3rd party drivers. And there are more and more megabytes of user-level code. Our beloved C/C++ language does nothing to prevent a careless developer from silently corrupting memory in user space.
- 3) Initialization architecture -- NT 4 has to reboot constantly during setup and reconfiguration (Win95, too).
- 4) Versioning -- I know we are attempting to address this with self-healing DLLs and ZAW, maybe that is enough, maybe not.

It's not that any other product on the market is any better than us, they aren't! BUT, someone could come up with a much smoother OS that didn't have these problems, and supported a web browser and Java, and it could be a very interesting threat to Windows.

I understand absolutely that it is easier for Jim to say "NT code base is a given". But our competitors don't have that constraint. Just because we do exploratory work that is unconstrained doesn't mean we have to ship that unconstrained

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work -- it is exploratory. Given my work on OS/2, MS-DOS 6, and IE, I think I have a pretty good understanding of the dynamics and importance of compatibility. But when I see managers telling people to put on blinders about exploring the future, I am very afraid that we're going to cut ourselves off from the best possible future.

One thing you could do to help me -- I've scheduled the middle mgmt retreat for Nov 24/25 (overnight at Salish Lodge), and unfortunately you've got an NT 5 review scheduled for part of the day I think on the 24th. If you could send <mailto:kayb> a short note saying it is OK to reschedule that review, I'd be able to get moshed and several of his direct reports (all of whom will be very valuable contributors to this retreat) to attend.

Thanks, bens

-----Original Message-----

From: Bill Gates
Sent: Sunday, October 26, 1997 2:54 PM
To: Ben Sivka
Subject: Last email

I want to apologize for my last email.

It was extreme and rude (and not very empowering).

I had a point to make about sanity being important and coordination being important. I wanted to make clear how impossible your criteria would make Jim's job.

However I really said this in a bad way that I feel bad about. I don't make this mistake often - maybe 3 times a year. I woke up last night realizing what a bad piece of mail it was.