

As Seen On:



## Time To Call Microsoft's Bluff

By Khan Klatt

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A recent Washington Post article suggested that Microsoft plans to argue that its Internet Explorer (IE) browser is inseparable from its Windows 2000 and Windows XP operating systems.

Microsoft further threatened that if it is forced to remove IE from Windows 2000 and Windows XP, it will have to take those operating systems off the market and will be unable to produce any new versions.

### Everyone Else Is Doing It

Microsoft would have us believe that its products are dominant because they are the best. The software giant suggests that such companies as Netscape were badly mismanaged, and that companies like Apple and Sun produce products that are inferior to Microsoft's own. This attitude seems to indicate that Microsoft believes it is truly capable of doing anything that can be done on a computer.

Everything, that is, except for shipping an operating system that comes without an integrated Web browser. Microsoft may say it is the zenith of the software industry, but the company also says it can't find a way to ship Windows without IE.

Curiously, Microsoft competitors Apple, Sun and Linux seem to be able to accomplish this insurmountable feat without much difficulty.

Prior to Windows 98, even Microsoft found a way to ship an operating system without an integrated Web browser. While Internet Explorer was bundled with Windows 95, it wasn't welded into the operating system in a desperate attempt to gain market share over Netscape.

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## Integration, Not Bundling

The issue at stake here isn't really whether Microsoft should have the right to ship a Web browser with its operating system. It's quite obvious that a Web browser is a useful utility in a modern operating system. The real issue is whether an illegal monopoly should have the power to essentially decide which browser you will use by forcing it into the operating system.

Computer operating system requirements continually increase with each new release. Oses also tend to get better, so people with older computers are often compelled to upgrade. What you once could do with 32 MB of RAM now requires 64 MB. If you had 64 MB of RAM in your computer before, now you have the bare minimum required to run your new operating system.

Take the case of Windows 95. Since it was not bundled with IE, you could run Windows 95 and then pick and choose between IE and Netscape, each of which had a similar impact on system performance. The memory overhead and speed of the browsers were effectively equivalent.

Then came Windows 98. With this operating system on the same computer, computer users run IE whether the IE browser is open or not. This means that launching Netscape on a Windows 98 computer makes it slower than it was under Windows 95 because IE is taking up resources that it didn't use before. In the end, this means there is a disincentive for anyone to use a browser other than the integrated browser, which was welded into the operating system purely for anticompetitive reasons.

## Devil's in the Details

The nuance between integration and bundling is a subtle one. There is no technical reason to integrate a browser with an operating system, when all other applications on a computer are required to use published APIs to the operating system. Consumers should be given a choice of whether to use a bundled browser instead of being forced to have one integrated for them.

For Microsoft to suggest that it is impossible to remove IE from Windows -- and that it would simply refuse to offer any version of Windows if it were forced to do so -- is ludicrous considering the assertions it makes about being an innovator and leader in the software industry. In addition, the company's previous products accomplished that feat without difficulty.

Indeed, the only reason why IE is integrated into Windows is to force people to choose between IE and buying more RAM or a faster computer so they can run the browser of their choice equally well.

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