

## another Sacrifice on the Altar of Standardization

Prelude #1: This is an honest-to-goodness story. I swear it by all I hold holy and dear. I walked into a meeting last week. Big, high-falutin' meeting with government representatives from all over the country. A woman, the contractor, was taking notes on an IBM ThinkPad. About five minutes into the meeting we had to take a break — the machine froze. It wouldn't reboot. She ultimately had to take the battery out and wait for some predetermined time interval before plugging it back in and getting to to rouse itself from the Windoze-induced coma. This was a normal event for her.

Prelude #2: Another honest-to-goodness story. The above vows of truth apply here also. About two months ago I was in the facilities of the giant defense and spook company Lockheed, which does work for the company I work for under contract. I went to a new Micron Millennium with Windoze NT 4.0.my.God, service-packed so well that it walked funny. The cursor wouldn't move when I moved the mouse. In true Dilbertesque style, a lady leans out of a neighboring cubicle and says "Tilt the machine forward." If I was playing pinball I suppose that would be great advice, but I was trying to do some work so I looked at her like she'd just grown another head. She said, "Seriously, tilt the machine forward. It does that all the time. Just tilt it forward and the mouse will move again."

Now, excuse me, but aren't both these machines held as as examples of the spectacular quality offerings of the Wintel world? Imagine, if you will, the odds of this happening randomly. That a single individual, me, could be at precisely the proper point in time and space to witness these events is just odd, but I assure you it's not that rare.

On to the story...

## h, Behave!

I stopped by to help out an old friend the other day. She was making many, many copies of a thick presentation. She had to carry the large stack of presentations up three floors. Being a gentleman (or so I like to think), I offered to carry them. If you know Michelle, you'll know that helping her out isn't hardship duty.

As we progressed upward, she told me that "It took me longer to do the charts on the PC since I'm used to a Mac." I told her that once she was used to the PC it would still take longer, given the carefully designed inefficiencies in Windoze.

She told me "Well we had to go to PCs because of the incompatibilities between the Macs and PCs." I asked her "What, specifically, are the incompatibilities you're talking about?" She said "You know, they can't read each others' files."

I paused for a few moments, eyeing her. She's a real babe. Did I mention she's a babe? Now, the files she's talking about are PowerPoint and MS Word files. I said "Michelle, that's not true. I pass Office '98 files back and forth with Office '97 on a PC all the time."

## ork With Me Baby

And therein lies the morale of this story. What is compatible? What does that really mean?

It was more difficult to pass files from Office 4.2.1 on the Mac to Office 95 on the PC. Though, as a matter of record, I successfully did that all the time also.

Earlier this year, our office went from Office 95 to Office 97. A strange phenomenon ensued. All of a sudden the part of the office that had yet to make the transition (this is no easy matter) couldn't read the files sent from those that had "upgraded." Chaos reigned, women wept, men cursed. The entire organization suffered from a severe case of digital constipation.

Across our entire installation, a year later, some organizations have not yet made the leap from Office 95 to Office 97. Not only is the Office software very time-consuming to install (done by paid support people), it's damned

expensive to boot!

So, in direct contravention of the "wisdom" that buying Windoze is standardizing, we're still "unstandardized" after going to Office 97 around a year ago. The fact of the matter is that, at best, standardization can only be achieved for a fleeting moment in time. It's a snapshot.

Next year we'll have to start putting in different machines — the old new ones are slowly grinding to a halt. Offices are in a constant cycle of OS upgrades, application upgrades (or downgrades in some cases), hardware upgrades, technology advances, etc. Any group of people, simply put, is in a constant state of computer flux.

The fact that an otherwise critical, questioning person bought the "splendors of standardization" myth tells me that many otherwise smart people have as well. Some forms of standardization are good. (For example, it's well documented that standardizing on Macs saves money.) Having real standards, not Microsoft-inflicted ones, is good.

## his Sort of Thing Ain't My Bag, Baby

When the shills and zombies of the corporate world promote standardization, it's important to frisk them for drugs and/or checks from Microsoft. Most of the time, at least in the corporate world, standardization is a dream. If it's achieved, it's fleeting.

I'm still totally blown away that the entire world will settle on MS office so that we can be "standard." Why? Where's the thoughtful analysis that said the capability of the product is worth the astronomical cash outlay? I say that absolutely no one in the corporate world did a cost-benefit analysis of buying ClarisWorks Office and the PC Version of MacLink Plus.

Therefore, these folks have abdicated their responsibilities to understand what's out there and what gives you the best bang for the buck. That doesn't mean we have to as well. I looked it up in the dictionary. "Standardize" does not mean buying the latest gargantuan piece of incomprehensible software. Not yet, anyway, though I hear that Microsoft is trying the buy Webster's Dictionary so they can redefine a few things.

Now if you'll excuse me, Michelle needs me to follow her back up the steps with another stack of briefings. I've got to go.

Oh, and by the way, the briefings are reports on the progress a huge

government operation has made (or failed to make) in taking care of their Y2K problem. I'm afraid to look. Ahhh, the joys of standardizing on Windows.

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