

Anyone who has ventured within earshot of me over the last six months has heard me complain about my travails with Windows NT. "I've installed NT 27 times. But it's been on the same four machines, so I can't really call myself an expert" was one line people seemed to like at DevCon. "I can install NT, Office and Visual Studio without turning on the monitor" was another that had them rolling in the aisles. "FDISK is your friend" of course is another oft-repeated mantra.

As I'm writing this, I'm now well into my fourth dozen of NT installations. To be fair, I've ventured into the territory of beta operating systems, but I've done this before, and once ran a production notebook on a beta OS for nearly a year. So I'm not exactly a babe in the woods.

This stuff is too hard. It simply doesn't work well enough to be called a "mission critical foundation" or whatever marketing dreamt up lately. The excuse is "But have you checked the hardware compatibility list?"

No, I haven't. "Well there you go!" Kind of like <Joe Nontanga in NYC in a SNL skit>.

But this isn't some bargain clone that a 17year "crafted" together with spare parts in his basement last Saturday while checking out the latest Dead Kennedy's CD. It's a three year old box from a top five manufacturer - they sold tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands - of these boxes. Sure, the individual chip sets vary from run to run (they vary from minute to minute, as I recall, but that still happens for hardware on the HCL, so it's not a way out.)

But the argument is that "if it's not on the list, it's not guaranteed." That's a load of crap. When you buy the latest CICS from IBM for your five year old mainframe, do they ask you if it's on a "HCL?" No!

But that's a captive market. IBM built the 3090 too, so they better get it right. MSFT doesn't make all the boxes, so they can only certify NT on...

But this isn't a captive OS written for a captive box. You can buy NT at the local sporting goods store, for gosh sakes. (Well, you can in Milwaukee. I swear I am not making this up.)

So guess what? Some bozo is going to load NT on their Apple McIntosh. Or a SparcStation that they had laying around in the garage. And it's not going to work. This is MSFT's fault, not the fault of that bozo.

Why?

When I build a form that has two buttons, and button A has to be pushed before button B, do I set it up so the user can push button B first? Heck no. You don't allow the user to do stupid things, cuz otherwise they'll do it, if for no other reason than to find out "what would happen if..."

So now NT is being sold by the gazillions. And it's not all being installed by corporate MIS departments in glass houses with eight figure annual support budgets. It's also being installed and supported by a guy who runs a machine shop in Kansas City who managed to get Novell running on his 17 station LAN. And by a 53 year old itinerant who seems to stay at a job only long enough to wreak havoc before moving on. And by a 31 year old who has passed every MSFT certification exam known to man, but hasn't actually ever seen a real customer before.

NT has to be able to withstand these folks before it can be considered mission critical. And it ain't there yet.

Don't mistake me, I prefer NT over Win9x, even though it doesn't recognize everything, and it's harder to learn. It still handles GPFs more gracefully, and runs just about everything I need it to. Most of the boxes in our shop are running NT, and we don't see a better alternative.

But I wouldn't want to be put on life support that's running on an NT box, or fly on a plane when NT is running the autopilot.

Do yourself, and your customers a favor, before you let them be pulled to the dark side. Show them a print-screen of the BSOHD (Blue Screen of Hieroglyphics and Death) that NT displays when some "bad" happened. You know - the 50 line hex dump display. Then simply ask them what they're going to do when they see this on their server the morning they are going to do their year end close. If they don't have an answer...