

## THERESE POLETTI'S TECH TALES

Clamoring for Microsoft to keep XP alive

Commentary: Why not kill Vista instead of Windows XP?

By

[Therese Poletti, MarketWatch](http://www.marketwatch.com/news/mailto.asp?x=116+112+111+108+101+116+116+105&y=Therese+Poletti&z=marketwatch.com&guid=%7Bb5f4cac3-cdc8-488a-8849-6883d5c78053%7D&siteid=mktw)

Poletti, MarketWatch

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SAN FRANCISCO (MarketWatch) -- After being spurned by Yahoo Inc., Microsoft Corp. Chief Executive Steve Ballmer surely has too many other problems right now to ever listen to the following suggestion. Moreover, there is not a chance it will ever happen, not after all the billions of dollars the software giant's probably poured into marketing and developing what may be its most unpopular operating system, Windows Vista.

But in the wishful thinking/fantasy department, I think Microsoft

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should euthanize Vista and write it off as a big mistake. Many

consumers looking for a new computer also may prefer my idea. Because after June 30, Microsoft will stop most sales of its seemingly more successful operating system, Windows XP.

I am not alone in my lunacy, A group has formed to try to save Windows XP on the technology news site InfoWorld. (OK, the petition only has almost 194,000 signatures, but it legitimizes the notion that not everyone wants Vista.) The petitioners want Microsoft to keep selling Windows XP indefinitely -- which is asking a lot, but compared with the alternative is understandable.

<http://weblog.infoworld.com/save-xp/>>See the petition.

Even the big PC makers seem to be more receptive to the outcry than Microsoft. Dell Inc. (<http://www.marketwatch.com/quotes//dell>>DELL  
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Lenovo are all offering consumers a way to purchase a PC or a notebook computer with the last version of XP via a so-called downgrade. This basically means you are paying for Vista and getting the discs, along with the option of upgrading to Vista anytime in the future. The core Windows business is slowing because consumers and businesses just don't want to upgrade to every new version of its complex and unwieldy operating system anymore.

I called up H-P myself and asked if I could buy a PC with XP instead of Vista. "Why would you want to do that?" the sales representative asked. "Because everyone I know who uses Vista hates it, including a former IBM executive," I said. "And if computer geeks and developers don't even like it, why should consumers?" The sales rep went on extolling the virtues of Vista.

I finally told him I really did not want a PC with Vista. The salesperson said that I needed to stop listening to "amateurs" and read some real reviews. (H-P should be proud; this guy really has drunk the Vista Kool-Aid.)

The sales rep reluctantly told me to call H-P's business sales so that I could get a computer with XP. Businesses have been fending off upgrading to Vista because of the new hardware requirements -- that is, the need to buy completely new systems with more storage capacity, more memory and more processing power. H-P in the United States will continue to offer the Windows XP downgrade on its business desktops, notebooks and workstations through July 30, 2009. To be fair, Microsoft also is making XP available to system builders until January 31, 2009 and will sell XP Starter and XP Home for ultralow-cost PCs until June 30, 2010.

But the Vista issue illustrates a larger problem at Microsoft, and one reason why it tried to make such a colossal bet on Yahoo

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The company's core Windows business is slowing because consumers and businesses just don't want to upgrade to every new version of its complex and unwieldy operating system anymore. Microsoft needs new engines for growth, and at the same time it does not want to cede the entire online-advertising market to Google Inc.

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Microsoft's most recent earnings report gave ample evidence of what may be a surging rebellion from computer users. In its most recent fiscal third quarter, revenue for its so-called client business, or Windows, came in at \$4 billion, about \$300 million below analysts' estimates of \$4.3 billion for that business.

<http://www.marketwatch.com/news/story/microsoft-should-nuke-vista-instead//News/Story/microsoft-tops-profit-estimates-sales/story.aspx?guid=%7B34B5F7DC%2DCB41%2D4CC3%2DA062%2D6A822CCF41D2%7D> See full story.

Bill Gates, the Microsoft co-founder and chairman who is stepping down from day-to-day involvement in July, has come out swinging in defense of one of the last operating systems developed during his reign. He told reporters in Japan Wednesday that Microsoft has sold 140 million copies of Vista so far, calling that a "very rapid sales rate." Yet the bluster from one of the world's most highly respected computer geeks cannot change the perception among many that Vista is a dud. "It slows me as a human because it is so hard to use," said a friend of mine, a Microsoft developer who for obvious reasons does not want to be quoted by name. This developer added that his whole team dislikes Vista, which requires about 15 gigabytes of free hard-drive space on a PC, according to the company.

Scott McNealy, the former chief and now chairman of Sun Microsystems Inc. (<http://www.marketwatch.com/quotes//java>)

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frequently referred to Microsoft's various versions of its operating systems as "hairballs of code." As Vista ballooned to more than 50 million lines of code when it was finally launched in January 2007, McNealy must have felt good about calling a spade a spade.

Just last month, two Gartner analysts wrote a bold report, discussing the problem Microsoft faces with its increasingly complex operating system.

"In the development of 'Longhorn' [the code name for Vista], Microsoft came to the conclusion that Windows had become too big and complex, forcing a reset back to a known good code set based on Windows Server 2003, and this is a large part of the reason that Windows Vista delivered primarily incremental improvements," wrote Michael Silver and Neil MacDonald, the Gartner analysts who co-authored "Windows is Collapsing."

Silver and MacDonald said that in an increasingly mobile world, operating systems need to become less complex as users tend to use their mobile phones for email and Web surfing, as well as for navigating and even reading the occasional document or file. However, as computer systems and networks get more complex and scale higher in performance, the need for hefty security features and reliability is more of a necessity. The operating system seems to grow to address these and other issues of complex systems.

Microsoft asserts that Vista is here to stay. It will provide tech support for XP customers until April 14, 2009 and "extended support," meaning customers can get tech support on a pay-per-call basis, through April 8, 2014. It also will provide any necessary security

patches for free.

"It's still very early in its life cycle," said Kevin Kutz, director of Windows client at Microsoft, about Vista. He added that Microsoft is pleased with the adoption of Vista so far. "Consumer interest is strong. ... The enterprise side, they are doing their traditional thing, making sure everything is ready for deployment."

For those of you dreading the day your employer makes the switch to Vista, that means it may only be a matter of time.

End of Story

Therese Poletti is a senior columnist for MarketWatch in San Francisco.