Windows 95: Truth missing from hype

Microsoft's new operating system for Intel-based PCs. was unveiled Aug. 24 amidst a mixed din of fanfares and jeers. Ever since Microsoft

announced its development of the newest incarnation of Windows (then code-named "Chicago"), the media, competition and public had been abuzz with speculation, praise and criticism.

Despite Microsoft's impressive PR campaign surrounding Windows 95, there is still a bewildering array of information being spewed at potential buyers: some accurate, some false and some halfway in between.

With all the positive and negative propaganda circulating, many software consumers don't have a completely accurate understanding of Windows 95. its benefits or its drawbacks. Even on the Internet, a former bastion of technical savvy, people frequently exchange complete falsehoods about Windows 95 as if they were common knowledge. Here are some of the myths about Windows 95, accompanied by a dose of reality:

Windows 95 runs on top of DOS, just like Windows 3.1.

False. Windows 95 is a completely stand-alone operating system and has direct control of the computer's hardware. Windows 3.1 relied on DOS as an interface between itself and the system hardware.

One message by an adamant Usenet reader about Windows 95's multitasking capabilities proclaimed that all one had to do was look on the box to see that Windows 95 is a "preempted" operating system, clearly meaning that it runs on top of DOS.

The term I believe Mr. Wizard was groping for is preemptive multitasking. It means that Windows 95 can run multiple programs simultaneously while maintaining absolute authority over the time and resources allocated to each process. The result is significantly smoother operaCOMMENTARY Joshua Olson

tion when multiple applications are running. This is possibly the most important new feature Windows 95 has to offer.

Its predecessor, Windows 3.1, relied on the individual programs to relinquish control to other processes. Remember what it was like under Windows 3.1 trying to print a paper in the background while transferring a file via modem? The two processes would fight for the computer's resources at the expense of whatever else you wanted to do. Windows 95's 32-bit preemptive multitasking makes this feat noticeably smoother even when many such tasks are vying for the CPU's attention.

Microsoft is plotting an evil scheme to steal private data from users and eventually command the world's computers.

The scary thing is that people believe this one. Windows 95 and the Microsoft Network provide an option to send system information (processor type, video card, CD-ROM, etc. along with on-line registration of the software.

Conspiracy theorists shriek that it's possible to send confidential information stored on the hard drive during that process. It's also possible that Windows 95 contains a secret Trojan horse which, on Jan. 1, 1996, will format the world's hard drives and cause their modems to call the President, demanding that Bill Gates be named "White House Advisor on Nerds.

Some people have too much time on their hands.

Windows 95 crashes every 10 minutes

Actually, Windows 95 is quite stable - more so than Windows 3.1 but less than Windows NT. Windows 95 is especially good at handling misbehaving 32-bit applications. Instead of crashing the whole system, programs that go haywire are smoothly killed,

and an informative notice is displayed to the user.

MacOS is better. Nyah.

Windows 95 could be HAL 9000 and there would still be those who worshiped the Macintosh. HAL it isn't, but Windows 95 makes better and more sophisticated use of system resources than MacOS on a similarly-configured Macintosh. System 7 just doesn't have the same technology

Some prefer the Macintosh interface or various other features; for them MacOS is the best choice. But Windows 95 is the better multitasker and manager of system resources.

Windows 95 requires a Pentium computer and at least 16 MB of RAM.

Of course Windows 95 demands more from the computer than Windows 3.1. Just as you wouldn't expect to be able to run Windows 3.1 on a 286 with 2 MB of RAM, Windows 95 needs more than the practical minimum under Windows 3.1. Computers that performed only tolerably with Windows 3.1 will need hardware upgrades before moving to Windows 95. Increased functionality requires increased computing power.

Even having said that, Windows 95 runs quite nicely with a medium system configuration. Although Windows 95 requires only a 386 processor with 4 MB RAM, a fast 486 with 8MB should be considered the practical minimum. At that configuration, Windows 95 runs comfortably as long as only a few low-demand applications are run concurrently. Users running compute- or memory-intensive applications such as graphics, database or scientific software will need more power and RAM.

Windows 95 is the best thing to happen to PCs since the 8086 processor.

Hmm. Maybe.

Joshua Olson is the on-line editor for the Emerald.

Ad Correction:

The Nov. 21 ad for Hirons should have read:

"Curiously Strong" **Altoid Mints** 99¢ ea.

The Emerald apologizes for the error.







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