

Microsoft Windows XP Launch: The eXPerience, or eXtra Painkillers

Required for Small Businesses?

By Joshua Feinberg

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Microsoft Windows XP Launch: The eXPerience, or eXtra Painkillers Required for Small Businesses? You Decide

Focus on Windows XP Product Activation

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Deck:

"Don't let the slick marketing presentations fool you. All the Microsoft Windows XP controversy in the media over the past several weeks does impact your small business computer support costs."

July 16, 2001

Morganville, NJ

How many Microsoft marketing MBAs (oops, I mean "product managers") does it take to release Microsoft Windows XP?

Give up?!? - One hundred

One to create all the sleep-inducing PowerPoint slideshows

One to click the mouse, advancing the canned slides during the demo

One to write the fairy-tale (sorry another slip, I mean "press release")

And another 97 to generate the truckloads of white papers that are supposed to brainwash you into believing that last year's version of Microsoft Windows, you know the one you just finished installing, stinks like rotten eggs

If you've been closely following the "soap opera" that industry pundits refer to as the weeks leading up to the Microsoft Windows XP launch, you're probably getting dizzy just trying to follow the abundant controversy and scandals. And that's even ignoring the more closely followed news of Microsoft's antitrust ruling and the MSN Messenger outage. It's almost a full-time job, just trying to keep up with the Jerry Springer-like drama surrounding the anticipated release of Microsoft Windows XP.

But before we go any further, and get any closer to Microsoft's planned October 25th Windows XP release date, let's take a few minutes to regroup and look at how some of these Windows XP issues will impact your small business computer support costs. And for those of you fortunate enough to have missed the current events as they were unfolding, consider this a quick rundown.

In this issue, we'll look at Windows XP Product Activation. Next time, I'll continue to analyze how at least another half-dozen other related issues might impact your small business computer support costs with Microsoft Windows XP.

Smart Tags - Microsoft Windows XP & IE 6

As discussed in our July 2nd issue of "Tips", Mossberg Rattles Microsoft into Reversing Stance on Windows XP IE 6 Smart Tags (see <http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com/news/archives/tips070201-bn1.htm>), Microsoft had planned on using its dominant market share in the web browser space to hijack web traffic, via "Smart Tags", to its own or preferred web sites.

Microsoft Windows XP Product Activation

For years, most of us have wisely ignored PC hardware and software vendors' annoying Warranty or User Registration postcards. Regardless of whether we swept this administrative minutiae under the rug because we were lazy, didn't sense a compelling or serious risk, or just wanted to avoid

getting hammered with "special offers" (marketing-speak for junk-mail), I don't know many who feared retaliation for refusing to turn over personal demographic data.

Background

It's a whole new story for Microsoft Windows XP. It seems that the soon-to-be-released operating system will literally go "on strike" and refuse to continue working if you don't "activate" the product during the allowed grace period.

Early reports promise that large corporate customers on enterprise site license agreements will be exempt, as well as people purchasing PCs from certain OEMs. What about the rest of us mere mortals in the small business world?

Now as a freelance writer, I'm one of the first to condemn both casual and planned software piracy. But Windows Product Activation is a draconian way of enforcing compliance. Here's why.

What if Microsoft controlled _____? (fill in the blank)

Imagine the public outcry if this logic were applied in other situations.

What if, for example, a paroled felon, under house arrest and being monitored by one of those "ankle bracelet" contraptions, fails to call in to their parole officer during a "configuration change" - such as moving from room to room, changing clothing, or bathing? Should the ankle bracket automatically inject the person with a heavy dose of tranquilizers that can only be countered by "reactivation"?!?

What if you forget to return an overdue video rental on time? Should the videotape sitting in your VCR be able to disable your VCR until the rental is returned?

I can think of only one example where this logic applies --- parking tickets. In many large cities, if you have a sizable amount of unpaid parking tickets, the police can immobilize your car with a "boot" until the summonses are paid.

So, we're now at the point where Microsoft's power over our daily lives rivals a major city's police force.

How does Windows Product Activation affect small business PC support costs?

So, how does Windows Product Activation impact small business computer support costs?

Every time a major configuration change is made to a PC, your internal guru or small business computer consultant will need to call into Microsoft Sales and plead your case for getting an unlock code. So the Inside Sales Rep becomes the judge, jury, and executioner.

And this whole process adds time (which of course means money) onto any major installation and troubleshooting efforts surrounding Microsoft Windows XP.

Or plan B, if your hard drive rolls over due to mechanical failure, or your new PC hard drive just needs a routine "rebuild" to continue functioning at peak levels, you can just throw away the copy of Microsoft Windows XP that you already own and buy another!

Concerns over privacy abuse with Windows Product Activation

Also consider the privacy issues. When you initially activate Microsoft Windows XP, Microsoft takes a "snapshot" of your hardware baseline configuration. Think of it like a fingerprint.

Posted privacy policies notwithstanding, do you really think Microsoft won't be tempted to "sell" or "barter" a list of millions of people who are activated for Windows XP, but have a sub-optimal amount of RAM?

I know if I were VP of marketing at a company like Kingston Technology, I'd love to get my hands on that database.

What about people who activate Microsoft Windows XP with broadband Internet access and no personal firewall? Forgetting about hackers who would eat that stuff up alive, think about the ISVs who sell personal firewall software. What a scandal that breach of privacy would be!

Note: Microsoft's official statement on Windows XP Product Activation is located at <http://www.microsoft.com/WINDOWSXP/guide/activation.asp>

The Bottom Line

Microsoft Windows XP may offer some features that ultimately reduce your small business computer support costs. However, don't let the slick marketing presentations fool you. All the Windows XP controversy in the media over the past several weeks does impact small businesses.

In the last issue of "Tips", we recapped how The Wall Street Journal's award-winning Personal Technology columnist Walter Mossberg raised public awareness of the dangers of "Smart Tags" in Windows XP and Internet Explorer 6. This week, we looked at Windows XP Product Activation and how Microsoft's latest attempt at combating software piracy means major headaches for small business internal gurus and computer consultants.

In the next installment of "Tips", we'll continue to focus on the upcoming Microsoft Windows XP product launch and how various third party news stories provide a valuable glimpse into what to expect from Microsoft Windows products going forward.

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