

The Battle Over Desktop Real Estate

By Paul E. Burke

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I was watching a late night financial program on television in early July when I learned that Microsoft is allowing PC manufacturers to control which icons are included on new Desktops. Historically, Microsoft has argued that the Windows Desktop was their "sacrosanct intellectual property" and that only their icons -- not those of their competitors -- could reside on the Desktop of a new computer.

This was highly interesting to me since it confirms what I have been repeatedly saying over the past year -- that the Windows Desktop is extremely valuable marketing real estate. As a matter of fact, Microsoft and its competitors found it to be so valuable that a federal court case was fought over access to the Desktop (among other issues regarding the Windows operating system).

It is interesting that there are still naysayers who question the marketing power of the Windows Desktop. One person comes to mind who wrote me to say that he thought Desktop marketing was a "neat gimmick." I was incredulous at this kind of uninformed attitude! You don't have to be a marketing genius to see that the Desktop is perhaps one of the most *logical* places to advertise. Think about it. What other screen on the entire computer system is the first screen you see when you boot up? What other screen is always visible? The Windows Desktop!

It is clear that Microsoft and their competitors don't view the Windows Desktop as a "neat gimmick." Federal court cases that cost millions of dollars are not fought over gimmicks no matter how "neat" they may be.

One thing I would like to point out is that Microsoft assigned an almost religious value to the Windows Desktop by referring to it as their "sacrosanct intellectual property." Let's take a look at the definition of "sacrosanct" as defined by Websters:

Sacrosanct comes from Latin sacrosanctus, consecrated with religious ceremonies, hence holy, sacred, from sacrum, religious rite (from sacer, holy) + sanctus consecrated (from sancire, to make sacred by a religious act).

When Microsoft called the Windows Desktop their "sacrosanct intellectual property" they assigned a holy or sacred value to it. Again, no "neat gimmick" here.

For the believers in Desktop Marketing the question is *how* to get their company on the desktop. Big companies that have the money are paying OEMs such as Compaq, Dell, and Gateway substantial sums to get their icon shipped on the Desktop of new computers. As a matter of fact, it was reported that AOL will pay OEMs around \$35 per computer to place AOL on the Windows XP Desktop. Ouch! \$35 per desktop shortcut. That's quite a King's ransom.

Historically, the cost of getting on the desktop has been extremely high which speaks to the value of desktop real estate. It is my belief that desktop marketing is going to fast replace the "old ways" of marketing. Let's face it. The performance of banners, text links, newsletters, and search engine positioning is usually nothing to get excited about. On the contrary, desktop marketing is highly effective and gets results and these successful companies know it.

So, once again, I am beating the drums for desktop marketing. Remember, there is a reason that America Online is a multi-billion dollar Fortune 500 company. The marketing executives at AOL are not wet behind the ears -- they are seasoned marketers who know they must be aggressive to get results. And desktop marketing is a key component in getting those results.

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