



MARKETING INSIGHTS

Marketing Windows 7 Has Microsoft learnt from Vista's Fiasco?

Windows 7 was released in October 2009, to rave reviews and great expectations. Sadly, just as Vista wasn't as bad as the media had us believe, Windows 7 won't be as good. As usual, Microsoft is charging an arm and a leg for the more complete versions of the operating system - like \$300 compared to Apple's modest \$40 upgrade for Snow Leopard. Before we look at the benefits of upgrading to Win 7, lets look at what went wrong with Vista. Has Microsoft learned the lessons?

The beginning

Let's recall that, in April 2007, two Seattle area consumers sued Microsoft for using deceptive tactics in its marketing. The results was that millions of new PCs ended up labelled 'Vista Capable' when they were anything but. Early in 2008, the court action became a class-action suit.

Late in 2008, the class action suit became the Microsoft Vista-Capable scandal. http://weblog.infoworld.com/robertxcringely/archives/2008/11/is_vista_capabl.html

Conceived at the height of Microsoft's hubris, Vista was a Wagnerian opera designed to dazzle spectators. When provincial theatres questioned whether they had enough resources to stage the mega-spectacle, Microsoft and stage designer Intel assured the paying public that even ordinary theatres would provide an acceptable performance.



Emails produced in the class action suite suggest that Microsoft was merely helping Intel move a large inventory of its old 915 graphics chipsets which struggled with Vista's AeroGlass effects. The scam got rid of Intel's backlog and is said to have made Microsoft an extra billion dollars in licence sales. Among those PC makers who'd shelled out extra dollars for better graphics chips, the watered-down Vista-capable standard created a huge discord.

When the Vista show opened at the beginning of 2007, Microsoft offered four different performance levels, from Home Basic for mums and dads to Ultimate for Wagner aficionados. It soon became clear that there were lines and stage props missing in all versions, which made the production difficult to follow for the uninitiated. Even the aficionados couldn't make sense of it, since the Ultimate version that was supposed to include everything, never did.

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Marketing Mayhem

This was the biggest production Microsoft had staged since Windows XP six years earlier, and it was turning into an expensive flop. Microsoft's rescue strategy was to throw millions into Vista marketing under the theme 'The Wow Starts Now', which was designed to entice millions of new opera fans into buying tickets. But all the Microsoft millions couldn't stop the word spreading that Vista was a flop not worth the money or the time. Worse, a rousing chorus of opera fans demanded that Microsoft bring back the 2001 classic, Windows XP.

Whatever you do, don't listen to your fans, critics or customers

Behind the scenes, Microsoft's engineers were hard at work fixing problems, but they could do little about the scale of the production and the incoherent libretto. What did Microsoft Marketing do? Launch another lavish marketing campaign under the theme '100 Reasons you'll be speechless,' which included lines like 'Using Windows Vista for the first time may leave you searching for words.' MS also let on that a new production was in the wings (SP1).

Apple was quick to take advantage of Microsoft's plight by running its highly effective 'I'm a Mac, I'm a PC' TV ads, and releasing OS X Leopard to generally rave reviews.



If all else fails, blame the user

A few months into 2008, it was clear that no amount of money thrown at marketing could change the shocking reputation Vista had attained. Microsoft responded by turning on its own users, apparently blaming them for Vista's performance problems:

'That state-of-the-art PC you bought last year might not feel like such a screamer after you install a dozen programs, load it with antispyware and antivirus tools, and download untold amounts of junk from the Internet. ... If you're the type of computer user who likes to keep eight programs and a dozen browser windows open at once—all while instant messaging your friends—don't be surprised if your PC bogs down.' NB: We're not making this up!

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-vista/Optimize-Windows-Vista-for-better-performance>

Reality bites

Halfway through 2008, 18 months after Vista's launch, some people at Microsoft at last began to listen. They decided to tell the 'real Vista story' which acknowledged some of the early problems, and pushed the message that 'Vista really is better than you think'. At the same time, the marketing folks at last decided to earn their money and do something original: In the 'Mojave Experiment', they invited 2,000 PC users to look at a new operating system called Mohave and provide their reactions. Of course, Mohave turned out to be Vista and 90% of the reactions were highly positive.

Seinfeld to the rescue

Then Microsoft's marketing folks lost the plot again when they dreamt up a new \$300 million ad campaign spearheaded by comedian Jerry Seinfeld and Bill Gates. The campaign baffled audiences far and wide and was canned after just a few weeks.

Some questions

Why is Microsoft so bad at marketing?

Good marketing is difficult if you don't respect your customers, and good marketing is not made easier by spending millions on bad campaigns

Does it matter?

No, it doesn't. Microsoft will sell more or less the same number of licences anyway – Vista or Windows 7 or whatever.

Should you upgrade to Windows 7?

There two answers to this question:

1. If you're used to Vista, which is stable now and runs alright on newer PCs, you have little to gain by upgrading.
2. If you're still using XP like most people, upgrading to Windows 7 is a major production best left to those who need a challenge in their lives. Wait until you're buying new PCs. That way you won't pay through the nose for the licence either.

How long will Microsoft support XP?

At least another 5 years. Meanwhile, if you want to speed up your Vista PC, here is an article we wrote 18 months ago. It seems to have helped a lot of people judging by the 300,000 hits it received <http://www.techsupportalert.com/make-vista-run-faster.htm>

If you want to get away from Microsoft operating systems, Apple makes a nice line of Leopard-based Macs. If you want to get away from Microsoft but don't have a lot of money to spare, you can always run Ubuntu or Open SUSE on your existing PCs. There is no simple upgrade from Windows XP to Windows 7, and that's as good a reason as any other to make the switch to Linux.



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