

Inside Perspective

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A tale of two operating systems...

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The imminent release of MAGIC OSAL SMP and Windows Vista move into juxtaposition the very heart of the technical issues which have made MAGIC a rock-solid choice as the foundation of a Healthcare Information System for over 20 years. MAGIC OSAL SMP arrives as a welcome extension to a reliable, easy-to-use, secure, operating environment while Windows Vista comes, in my opinion, as a long-awaited panacea to an operating environment that has somewhat disappointed in the realms of reliability, security, and ease of use.

I have often wondered what would have happened if MEDITECH had entered the market for commercial/consumer operating systems in the mid 1980s when MAGIC first entered our world. In his MACWORLD speech introducing the *iPhone*, Steve Jobs noted that part of Apple's success over time had been in adhering to a much-ignored computer scientist's principle to "design the software first and then invent the hardware you need to run it." His words ring in my ears every morning as I consider tossing my accursed Treo out into Boston Harbor on the way south to Canton. (Great email device, lousy phone.) MEDITECH has effectively adhered to this notion over the years not by becoming a hardware vendor, but by writing an operating system, carefully controlling the system platforms it supports, and by writing key software for clients and network devices that create a known, manageable environment in which their applications can succeed. CIOs, CFOs, and CMOs throughout the country have enjoyed the reliability, operational efficiency, and plain availability of their HCIS applications on the MAGIC platform. I wonder if we would have had all those conversations over the years about blue screens, memory leaks, service packs, spoofing attacks, and browser hijacks if we were running line of business applications like Exchange, Business Accounting, and PACS on the MAGIC Operating System.

This isn't to say that Microsoft hasn't done some terrific things for the industry. Frankly, without companies like Microsoft, Apple, and Intel, the global economic competitiveness of the USA would be severely threatened. It's hard to be Microsoft at this point. Even if you have a singular technical vision for your product that could change the world, you are forced to "dumb it down" in order to compromise with the thousands of disparate requirements of your consumer-driven base. Still, Microsoft's gifts often seem to come with a price. Until AMD came along, the latest release of Windows always seemed to match up nicely with the latest generation of Intel processors, producing the "Wintel" effect that kept the base price of a viable business PC at around \$1000 for nearly a decade. Enter AMD, and the floor has fallen to around \$600, depending on who you ask. Vista brings its own set of price/performance challenges to the desktop. To run the more

advanced graphical features embedded in the new OS, or even just to use most of the newer games, Vista's DirectX 10 currently only supports the nVidia 8800 GPU chipset, entry level versions of which will add \$300-\$400 to the cost of your Vista client. If you step back from it, it kind of makes you shake your head in disbelief, as running networked games is about the last place left where Windows PCs currently have a clear advantage over Macintosh for home use.

Deep cleansing breath. MEDITECH stands in contrast with Microsoft as MAGIC OSAL SMP makes its way out into the market this month. Here, a stable, secure, operating environment which has borrowed some of Window's goodness – a common hardware platform and array of peripherals – without appropriating all of Window's "issues" - takes the next step in supporting new technologies that will further secure the footprint of the MAGIC OS on Healthcare Information Systems for at least another decade. Look at what's happened for the MAGIC OS in six short years. It has been successfully abstracted onto the Wintel platform, which has reduced its entry cost, increased its storage choices, lowered the cost of hardware maintenance, and reduced its data center footprint. It has been buttressed by Integrated Serverless Backup and Integrated Disaster Recovery with the best replication and media management technologies that BridgeHead, Dell|EMC, HP, and IBM can offer to provide a rich set of choices for operational recovery and disaster recovery. It is now available, thanks to Stratus, in virtually zero-downtime configurations. With the advent of MAGIC OSAL SMP, and EBP (extended block pointer), MEDITECH MAGIC customers can take advantage of the multiple cores, faster buses, and more power-efficient server being spun out of the global CPU arms race. Microsoft might just wish that Windows was this stable and this secure. So might the rest of us for that matter.

Jim Fitzgerald, our CTO, is known for his placid demeanor, passivity, and Zen-like lack of opinions. He is completely open to your feedback, and is even interested in publishing your favorite MAGIC OS stories. Reader submissions are usually rewarded with a useless, impractical gift for their office. Next issue, Jim will dive deeper into SMP and EBP. Contact him via editor@jjwild.com.