

No. 90. Maddening Microsoft Does It Again!

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The word is out. If you purchase a copy of Microsoft's upcoming Windows XP or Office XP, your options as an owner of your computer are severely limited. According to a recent editorial in PC Magazine, Microsoft will no longer just strongly suggest that you register their product, they will insist that you do. If you fail to register in some period dictated by them, the software will stop working!

That is not the end of it. We are all used to Microsoft's insistence that you can only install software on a limited number of machines. In the case of XP, just two - perhaps a desktop and a laptop. Beyond that, the software will not work and you will need to contact the company if you try to install it on a different system. Furthermore, if you make major changes to your machine, the software will quit. For example, suppose you have an old Pentium and install XP on it and on your laptop. Three weeks later, you decide to upgrade, and you pop a new motherboard in your computer. The software will quit. You will have to contact Microsoft for their "permission" to use it in the modified machine, presumably by getting some kind of unlocking code from them. Otherwise, you are out of luck.

I have three machines in my office; a main computer, a secondary and a third that I use largely for ham radio related tasks. All three machines are connected to the Internet via individual modems, by way of two separate Internet Service Providers. Frequently, especially when designing laboratories for the computer classes I teach, I will use two of the three simultaneously. I will write the lab on my main machine and use the secondary to test pathways ("click Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools..."), or to run diagnostic programs as my students would to make sure everything works as it should. Now and then, I will even use all three machines for a complicated task. This allows me to develop the labs without interruption on one machine while simultaneously testing various aspects on a separate, or even two separate machines. All three have several operating systems on them. If all are powered and simultaneously running Win98, am I violating Microsoft's rules?

I probably am, according to the EULA (End User Licensing Agreement) that they clutter up your screen with. [Those letters should be transposed a bit to stand for Everyone's Unread Asinine Legalese.] But that is not how I look at it.

I am the sole owner of all three computers, and the ONLY user, ever. I purchased the hardware components and built them with my own hands. Furthermore, my hard cash paid for the software. True, the software is only a rental, but it is a disposable rental. Microsoft does not want it back when I am done with it. I should be encouraged to use that software in any way I want, on any number of machines, so long as I am the sole user. Of course, I may not copy and sell the software - everyone understands that to be the case (even pirates understand that what they are doing is illegal). However, so long as I do not violate that rule, I should be able to do anything I want with it. Even alter it to make it work better!

Microsoft is having problems with pirates, so their ploy is to put unduly restrictive rules on the end users that legally purchase the software as customers. Big Brotherism, par excellence. I resent that, and will not stand for it. Perhaps the time has arrived when a boycott is in order. Let us all look hard at Word Perfect, Star Office, X-Windows and Linux for replacement of Microsoft's ware.

A drop in sales is the only thing that they will unequivocally understand as a message from consumers.

I am done with the soapbox. Shall I mail it to you for your use? Happy computing!