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<div data-bbox="276 609 1057 644" data-label="Text"> <p>Updated 1/02/10, 12:00PM HIT, adds <a href="#">Letter to the Editor...</a></p> </div> <div data-bbox="186 674 1146 716" data-label="Text"> <p><i>"State of the Union"-type Analysis of Current PC/Windows Quality</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="194 751 1140 812" data-label="Section-Header"> <h2>Broken Windows, Broken Promises</h2> </div> <div data-bbox="144 844 1187 924" data-label="Text"> <p><i>Not Much Has Changed Since We Wrote "If PCs Could Fly" Over 15 Years Ago: PC/Windows Quality Is Still Atrocious</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="141 957 1192 1211" data-label="Text"> <p>HAIKU, Maui, Dec 31 – In an article titled "<a href="#">If PCs Could Fly</a>" (Dec 1994), we compared the poor quality of PC software and hardware with that of established industrial products, such as airplanes of pharmaceuticals. Quoting a Boeing executive, we said that if airline manufacturers built their products the way PC makers do theirs, millions of people would be dying every day from unfortunate crashes. Here's an excerpt from that article:</p> </div> <div data-bbox="212 1245 1105 1491" data-label="Text"> <p>"You must improve the reliability of your computers," he (the Boeing executive) said (to a group of visiting IBM dignitaries). The IBMers were offended. They felt their machines were already highly reliable relative to the competition. They tried to point that out. The DP manager shook his head. "You don't get it, do you? Do you realize that if we built our aircraft the way you build your computers, you'd only have a 50% chance of making it home tonight?" The IBMers were stunned. Then, they went to work...</p> </div> <div data-bbox="212 1522 1118 1837" data-label="Text"> <p>Today (Dec 1994, ed.), no one is talking about the mainframe reliability anymore. It is simply taken for granted, just like the relative safety of "jumbo jet" air travel. Not so in the PC industry. This segment of the market is still roughly where the mainframes were in the 1960s. The "PC jets" are crashing millions of times every day. But since these systems die one at a time, and since only the customers' nerves, data and time are lost, not human lives, such tragedies go unrecorded in the media headlines (until the first time someone commits a suicide after seeing his life's work going down the drain as <i>WINDOWS</i> or other software crashes without a back up).</p> </div> <div data-bbox="646 1871 1192 1908" data-label="Text"> <p>(an excerpt from "<a href="#">If PCs Could Fly</a>" (Dec 1994))</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1291 611 1359 644" data-label="Text"> <p>quo</p> </div>

In an October 1994 private meeting with the then still relatively new IBM CEO, Lou Gerstner, held in Scottsdale, Arizona, this writer shared that Boeing story with Gerstner. And I suggested that the IT industry needed new buying standards:

Speaking as a customer, for a moment, of both IBM and Windows, I said that I was appalled by the poor quality of the software which has become the bestseller in the industry.

"I could not believe it," I said. "Windows is up and down like a toilet seat. If I were a car buyer, for example, in other words one of the established industries of which you've just spoken, I'd be screaming bloody murder. That would be like having my car in a shop every other day. Which American car buyer would ever put up with that?"

(an excerpt from ["Gerstner: An Untold Story"](#), Dec 2002)

The comment certainly got IBM CEO's attention at the time. But things are not any better 15 years later. Millions of PCs are still being delivered every year with broken Windows that crash "up and down like a toilet seat."

And if you try to replace your broken Window with a new one, well... good luck! It still takes "three PhD's and a mule" to do it with Windows 7 as it did back in 1994 with Windows 3.1. And the system is never quite right. Not even after you get the congratulatory message: "Success! You have successfully installed... the such and such a product" can you trust it 100%. Trust me. I've got some fresh scars to prove it.

What happened to me this month is a case in point. My practically brand new HP Notebook crashed on Dec 6. I spent the rest of the month recovering from it. And I am still not quite 100% there.

So shoddy quality of PC products and software still seems to be an accepted norm. In any other industry which dealt with critical issues or human lives, people would have long ago demanded the governments to step in and regulate such irresponsible behavior. But not in IT.

There is a silver lining, however. We have learned something valuable about HP's CEO Mark Hurd in the process of trying to repair our broken Windows. The way HP's boss handled the situation sets him apart from IBM's former chairman Lou Gerstner and Apple's CEO Steve Jobs. Wide apart.

For, Hurd actually *cares* about his customer. Hurd did not leave a trail of broken promises. He did what he said he would do. Hurd really did take decisive action to try to minimize the pain and suffering that his customer had to endure. It wasn't enough, as it turned out. But it was not his fault, either.

For, the main culprit in this story, as in the one 15 years ago, was Microsoft. Its Windows was like Swiss cheese back in 1994 (full of hole). It still is. But when you're a monopolist, who cares about quality, right? At least no one could ever accuse Bill Gates or Steve Balmer (former and current CEOs) of duplicity - claiming to be there for Microsoft customers, the way Gerstner and Jobs did.

### *Preface*

They say that people who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Count me in. Guilty as charged. I knew that Windows was broken. I knew that Microsoft made shoddy products. In fact, I may sound like a broken record writing about their flaws again. Yet here I am, like a drug addict, still using them.

It seems that every summer in the last three years I have tried to buy a new computer. And each time I failed. I tried and failed the scale the Mt. Vista in the summer of 2007 (see [Adios, Microsoft Vista! \(July 2007\)](#)). I even quoted the Founding Fathers' Declaration of Independence in it:

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."*

And I concluded that, "happiness, as I see it in the IT world today, is a world without Windows."

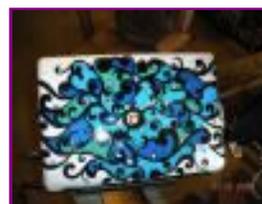
The following summer, I tried to get away from my broken Windows, seeking shelter under an Apple tree. All I ended up with was a bunch of other broken promises and a about \$900 in unrecovered expenses after I had tossed the Mac Pro back at Apple (see [MacAttack Falters at Foot of Mount Vista](#), June 2008).

This past June, I tried again. Ended up buying an HP Notebook with the Vista software. First, because that's all there was in the Windows world. Second, because HP assured me that the original Vista problems were *hasta la vista* now. Gone. Fixed.

Well, count that as another broken promise. So after a couple of weeks of testing, I sent that HP Notebook back. But being bare for punishment and a sucker of beauty, I fell for another HP product that came out back in July. It was a new "Artist Edition 2" Notebook. It was a thing of beauty, inside and out. And it was also top of the line technologically speaking. For the first time, I saw an IT product in the marketplace that met both my aesthetic and business needs.

Fifteen years ago, I also wrote about an upcoming refusion of arts and sciences (see [Refusion of Arts & Sciences](#), Nov 1994).

Technology did not necessarily have to be associated with ugly boxes. It seemed as if HP was the first company that finally



listened to me. So I proudly showed off my new Notebook everywhere I went, even when giving presentations at HP competitors' locations (see [My Cool-looking Laptop](#), July 2009).

### ***Play-by-Play Story of Latest PC/Windows Debacle***

I was a happy camper until Saturday, Dec 5. That's when my beautiful HP Notebook died as if from heart attack. It just stopped working. Dead as a door nail. It would not even boot up. In over 23 years of using various laptops, I have never seen anything like it. And I was just about to take off for a weeklong trip to New York. So the crash could not have happened at a worse time. I barely had enough time to transfer my email files to the old Toshiba laptop which I took with me on the trip. I left HP's Sleeping Beauty at home.

In response to my "SOS," an executive friend of mine from Paris suggested I switch to Apple's Mac. That might have been a viable long-term solution. But not this time. Not when I had to leave for New York within 24 hours. Besides, I had tried Apple and Mac before and ended up as frustrated as with Microsoft (see [MacAttack Falters at Foot of Mount Vista](#), June 2008).

Meanwhile, after exhausting all normal HP technical support channels, I wrote to the boss, Mark Hurd. I told him how much I had loved my beautiful new HP notebook. Which is why I was so grief-stricken when it died so suddenly. Here's an excerpt from my Dec 6 note:

Well, my beautiful four-month old HP "Artist Edition" laptop unceremoniously crashed Saturday night. It won't even start to boot up. It's basically a good looking boat anchor at the moment.

So after wasting over 10 hours with five (!) different HP tech reps and a supervisors over two days over (all from India, of course), they still want me to go on running the same stupid diagnostics that have already failed twice instead of replacing the system with a product that actually works. Plus they are sending me "recovery CD" that was never included when they shipped my new notebook. And it won't get here till Dec 16. And even if that recovery works, I will still have to spend untold hours reinstalling my programs and data.

I told them that if that's how HP treats its customers, it doesn't deserve to have many.

To make the long story short, Hurd immediately marshaled out appropriate HP executive support resources. By the time I landed in New York, I got a message from them that they were standing by ready and willing to help. Eventually, Hurd made them cut through the corporate bureaucratic crap and technical morass. They promised to get me a brand new replacement Notebook by the time I return home in a week's time.

Well, they didn't quite make it, but it wasn't HP's fault. FedEx, another shining star of corporate America, dropped the ball. My new HP Artist Edition 2 Notebook arrived two days after I got back home from New York.

### ***Mark Hurd Is No Gerstner or Jobs... And That's a Good Thing***

Let us pause here and change gears for a moment. This is where a silver lining comes in.

Back in January 1995, I became unwittingly a part of a plot involving Lou Gerstner and some of the most influential people in Washington, DC (see "[The Man Who Is 'Sir' to Potus](#)," Jan 1995 - an excerpt from "[Gerstner: An Untold Story](#)", Dec 2002). The story illustrated that Gerstner's alleged empathy for IBM customers was nothing more than cheap words. The former IBM CEO managed to step on some of the biggest toes in Washington while blaming his IBM subordinates for his own shortcomings.

I was struck by the contrast in the way Mark Hurd handled my current situation versus Gerstner's response to that customer problem in January 1995. Hurd grabbed the bull by its horns and battled it to the ground. Gerstner ignored an important customer, and then blamed everybody else for the consequences.

Last summer, Steve Jobs did the same. He had a flunkey call a customer on his behalf who only added more fuel to the fire... proving that Apple is for the birds, not for serious business customers.

So Mark Hurd is no Lou Gerstner. Nor Steve Jobs. And that's a good thing for HP shareholders. That's also the silver lining I have derived so far from this horror story.

### ***Microsoft's Broken Windows***

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, by Dec 15, I had a brand new HP at my office. But potentially it still had the same old Microsoft Windows Vista problems. So in consulting with the HP executive support person who contacted me on Mark Hurd's behalf, I wondered if I might not be better off just installing Windows 7. He wasn't convinced initially that was the right strategy. But another Windows Vista problem removed any doubts about it. The Windows Update function failed to work.

As it turns out, this problem was not entirely of Microsoft's making. Another competent and unusually candid "regular" HP tech support rep from Idaho (unlike some idiots I had been dealing with in India), told me that the Windows Update problem was something caused during by original factory install of Windows Vista. Which I supposed means it was of HP's making, not just Microsoft's. Either way, my new HP Notebook was defective as well, only in a different way from the original one.

So without waiting for a call back, I bought a full version of Windows 7 at a local store, backed up all my data, and installed Windows 7, completely obliterating the hard disk so that there are no traces of Vista left on it anymore.

Everything seemed hunky-dory until I installed Microsoft Frontpage (FP), the software I use for editing web pages, including this story. I'll spare you the gory details. Let's just say that, contrary to what everybody had told me beforehand, FP did not work properly under Windows 7. My internet web hosting provider assured me Windows 7 and FP were compatible, as did Microsoft tech support. (By this stage, I had given up dealing with HP tech support). Late on Christmas Eve, after running an exhaustive set of tests that took hours, a very competent Microsoft tech support rep (from India) admitted that there was a compatibility issue. He submitted the documentation to Windows 7 development team and promised a resolution in one of future updates.

### *Summary*

As we speak, I have now had to install twice the Windows 7 from scratch on the new computer. I have had to install the Frontpage and the rest of Microsoft Office 2007 applications at least three times. It has taken untold hours of effort, and several weeks of elapsed time to do all that, not to mention the frustration of having to take two steps back for every step forward.

As a result, I have been forced to neglect some of my business obligations. My family life has suffered. My musical and other artistic endeavors have had to take a back seat to the broken Windows and its broken promises.

Yet none of this would have enabled me to write this story for you had I not devised on my own an admittedly "mickey-mouse" bypass to the Windows 7-FP incompatibility issue. But one that works. "Necessity is a mother of invention," they say.

So what lessons can we take from all this?

First, technology has now become so ubiquitous that has intruded into almost every facet of our lives. So it is vitally important that it be of highest quality as it is that airplanes fly rather than crash, and the pharmaceutical products heal rather than kill. Yet it is not. And the average consumer is ill-equipped to deal with it, or even grasp the full magnitude of the problems technology can cause him/her.

Perhaps it is time for governments to step in and start to regulate behaviors of consumer-related IT companies. Alas, people must first scream for help.

*Just as the late Peter Finch yelled out of his window in the film, "Network,"  
"I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore!", millions of IT*

buyers now probably feel the same way.

Second, you know what's even more tragic that the failure of IT companies to improve the quality of their consumer products? The above lines were excerpted VERBATIM from my Dec 1994 article "[If PCs Could Fly](#)". So 15 years later, the sheeple are still shrugging, grinning and bearing it, instead of demanding action from their elected representatives. Which does not offer much hope that things will get much better in the next 15 years.

Which leads us to the third conclusion. The only thing you can really trust is your own intuition. "Trust only in yourself and your own horse," goes an old European proverb. In my case, after HP, Microsoft and my own internet provider's tech support staff threw up their hands in despair, the only thing that saved my hide in the end was my admittedly "mickey mouse" fix to Windows 7-FP issue. Without that, you would not be reading these lines. At least not any time soon.

And on that "happy note," Happy New Year 2010, everyone!

***Happy bargain hunting!***

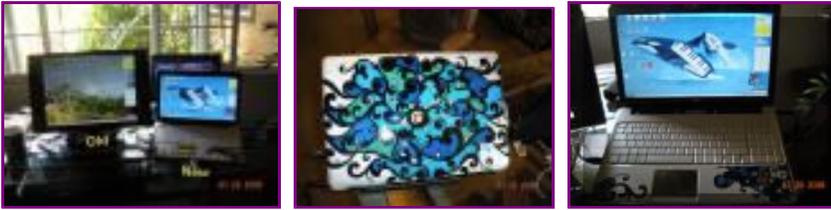
***Bob Djurdjevic***

### ***New Cool-looking Laptop***

HAIKU, Maui, July 19 - I got a new laptop delivered on Friday. My old one (Toshiba) was dying a slow and agonizing death. Like an old horse, it seems to be saying to be, "I've served you faithfully (more or less) for five years now. Don't I deserve a bit of R&R on some green pastures before I bite the dust?"

I took it seriously. I did not want to be around with all of my files inside its bowels when the Toshiba took its last breath. So for the last month or so, I have been investigating various options. And I finally succumbed to the Vista and got the latest HP "Artist Edition" Notebook, which was just released on June 29.

Of course, I expect to go through the pain and agony of conversion, migration and incompatibility issues even within the different products from the same source (like Microsoft and HP), let alone when dealing with multiple providers. But so far, the coolest thing has been the look of my new HP Artist Edition 2 Notebook. It was designed by a young Japanese woman who won a worldwide contest HP had run last year. Check it out...



In the left shot, you have the Old and the New - side by side. They look like "surf and turf," don't they? :-) The old one has double rainbows of the Rainbow Shower as its screen wallpaper, while the new one has the "musical whale," an image I designed back in march when I first listened to the whale sounds and added the keyboards to them. :-) The whale's grace and the blue backdrop go well with the new laptop design. Well, better than the "turf" (the rainbows over our land).

But back to computer design, not only is the HP Artist Edition notebook aesthetically pleasing in a physical sense, the artistic design has also embedded into its software and every window the operating system uses.

It seems, therefore, that finally somebody is listening to my [1994 message about the "refusion of arts and sciences,"](#) and the importance of good looks not just good performance of technology. In early 2006, I also wrote to some senior IT industry executives urging them to take beauty into account when designing their products and to do away with the "box" mentality that the technology has developed. I enclosed the photo on the right of my family room in Arizona as a case in point (of trying to deal with and hide the ugliness of techno boxes). Guess HP has been listening... and now delivering its first cut above the rest (of competition) and the "art of it all" (also see [MacAttack Falters at Foot of Mount Vista](#), June 2008 and [Adios, Microsoft Vista!](#), July 2007).



Alas, the science is still lagging behind. So I have been slugging it out with Microsoft, Apple, HP and a bunch of other vendors' products and support staff in the last few days, with more battles to come next week. Wish me luck...

Meanwhile, this update is the first "productive" bit of work I am sending you from my new cool laptop. Now I have to come up with a name for it. Want to help? Any ideas?

(an excerpt from my personal blog at [www.yinyangbob.com](http://www.yinyangbob.com))

### ***Letter to the Editor: Give It Up!***

***Also, two other experts speak up on use of technology***

HAIKU, Maui, Jan 2 - We don't often publish letters to the editor. But one

reaction we received from a prominent European IT and management consultant is worth sharing with the rest of our clients and readers. Here it is, along with excerpts from this writer's response:

*Happy New Year Bob.*

*I see you are still at war with ICT technology. Give it up. You cannot win. The simple fact is that personal-use ICT has become a commodity, and no one supports commodity products. We as consumers would not accept the price necessary to produce quality product and quality support for something that lasts a year and a half and is then discarded, and replaced by better, faster, cheaper (and equally unreliable).*

*HP is a case in point. Last year (2009) we bought 12 brand new HP laptops for our staff (top models). Within six months eight of them went to the shop for replacement of the screen, and two were replaced altogether.*

*This attitude has had a side effect of springing a brand new industry of small, independent IT consultants (or in my case a full time employee) who take care of these things. I want my laptop to work. I don't care how. That's his job. We have redundancy (12 laptops for 11 consultants), plus IT guy makes backups, upgrades, updates and new installs – everyone else is locked out of making any changes to the machine. If you want something special (and I always do), even though I know as much as he does about these things I obediently go to him and say "Budimir, please install this new software on my laptop and make sure it works." Then I go for a coffee.*

*People like us cost too much per hour to waste it on fixing computers, so we pay a little extra. People who have the time, don't care they have to spend hours with tech support since the product is cheap and they wouldn't be able to afford it if it was made properly.*

To which this writer replied:

*Hi, Bane. First, Happy New Year to you, too!*

*Second, you are absolutely right in everything you said. For a pragmatic businessman, your advice hits the mark.*

*As for myself, I don't want to have employees anymore. I don't want square-headed compugeeks around me. Been there, done that. I want to enjoy life beyond business and technology and use the latter pretty much the way an old fashioned writer used a pen or a pencil: **to tell stories.***

*Which is why I have been on a quest to find a pencil that works and does not require much beyond sharpening it once in a while. My mission on this planet is to uplift other people's souls, enlighten their minds and touch their hearts. I have to keep reminding myself of it every something like this happens. Some aspects of our lives cannot be measured in dollars and cents using pragmatism and logic as guides.*

To which Bane, the European consultant, replied:

*I understand you completely. What I suggest is that you do NOT upgrade technology so often. I find my 10 year old Pentium 1 notebook with Windows 2000 to be equally fast and useful in Word and e-mail as my latest dual-core with Windows 7. For what you do, you do not need the latest. Stay with the familiar, working hardware/software combination.*

*Regarding Front Page, that has been replaced by Microsoft Expression Studio.*

To which this writer replied:

*Believe it or not, that's actually what I have been trying to do. Getting a new laptop every 5 years or so has seemed adequate "protection" from new technology in the past. Alas, maybe I should lengthen the period...*

*As for FrontPage, I know it has been replaced by Expression Web. I learned that when I bought Office 2007 three years ago and found out FP was no longer a part of it. So it was precisely for the above reason – not wanting to chase new technology – that I have hung on to it till now. I am not anxious to invest more time learning about a new piece of software (Expression Web) right after I had wasted all this time debugging Windows 7 for Microsoft. Yet there comes a point in time when I must move on in order to function properly. Maybe the time has come now due to its incompatibility with Windows 7.*

The European consultant was not alone in offering me the "give it up" advice. Another senior HP consultant, the one who was so helpful to me in getting my first sick puppy replaced, also told me that he stays away from any new technology on his personal computer. He is still running an early version of Windows XP which he never allows Microsoft to update. He is not using any antivirus software, either, fearing that unwelcome computer bugs could actually infiltrated his system that way.

From his vantage point, all this extra security, designed to make us feel good about our latest system purchase, actually increases our costs and risks. It certainly eats up a lot of time just updating and maintaining the computer. Which is the time we could use more productively on other activities that give us joy instead of grief.

Finally, a corporate customer's view of the subject. Many years ago, somewhere in the mid-1980s, this writer visited a data center of a large insurance company. I was given a guided tour by the top IT executive. The CIO proudly showed off the latest technology he had on the computer floor, a good example of "with it" his company was.

"My boss (the CEO) loves for me to show this kind stuff off to visitors," he said at the end. "He revels in our use of advanced technology."

For some reason, I sensed that there was a "but" hanging in the air. "Thank you," I replied. "I see that you are indeed on the leading edge of technology."

"No," the CIO said, this time allowing his own emotion to fill the spoken words. "We are

on the bleeding edge of technology. And we've got scars to prove it."

I laughed. "There is my 'but'," I thought. And now, a quarter of a century later, I've also got emotional and financial scars to show what living on the bleeding edge of technology means.

"The more things change, the more they are the same" (Alphonse Karr, 1808-1890).



So now you know the "rest of the story," as seen through the eyes of three global consultants. Now you can pick and choose a PC strategy that feels right for you.

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