

FORCE Sight

BY STEPHEN FORCE

NO MORE OPERATING SYSTEM ALLEGIANCE— OPENING YOUR MIND TO THE OTHER POSSIBILITIES

As I was writing this column, the thought struck me as to how much my personal computer systems have changed this past year. Last year, I was working on a 20MHz 386 ESCOM (German-make) PC with 8MB of RAM, two hard disks with 350MB usable space and a German keyboard. When I had time to kill (hardly ever), I booted OS/2 2.0. Normally, I worked with MS-DOS 5.0 and Windows 3.1 with all of my goodies (fax/modem, multimedia, etc.) tricked in.

This year, I am using a 66MHz 486 Gateway 2000 PC with 16MB of RAM, two hard disks with 900MB usable space and an American keyboard (programmable at that!). The first hard drive has three bootable operating systems installed: MS-DOS 6.0, Windows NT (final version) and Santa Cruz Operations (SCO) Open Desktop (ODT) 3.0. With 66MHz available, I no longer wait for the system to IPL (whoops, I mean boot.)

My other new system is a Dell 486 66MHz with 32MB of RAM and a 750MB usable SCSI hard disk. I also have this disk partitioned with Dr-DOS

6.0 and OS/2 2.1. I normally have OS/2 running, as well as a whole slew of other applications. I have been evaluating NetWare for OS/2 for Novell for the past several months, so I have my NetWare 4.01 server running on my OS/2 platform.

By the way, all of my desktop or tower systems have CD-ROM drives installed. CD-ROM is here, folks. Most new software is, or will be, shipping via CD-ROM. All of my 32-bit operating systems (MS-DOS 6.0 also), as well as NetWare 4.0, were shipped on CD-ROM. With a few exceptions (mostly beta shipments), installing from CD-ROM is a pleasure.

I use WordPerfect for Windows to write these articles. I have used several of the other word processing packages and I find them all good, however, I have been using WordPerfect now for several years and will stick with it.

By now, you might be asking yourself: Why is Steve blabbering away about his configuration? Who cares?

My point is this: All of these operating systems are good, some even excellent.

Now that Windows NT is shipping, we can start making real comparisons of the three Intel-based, 32-bit, general-purpose operating systems: OS/2, Windows/NT and UNIX. Which one is better? Who knows?

I have a working knowledge of several popular Intel-based operating systems. However, I haven't a clue as to which will be the most successful. I am writing this month's column on Windows NT primarily because I have my best monitor (a NEC MultiSync 4FG) attached to the Gateway 2000. However, I could have written it in Windows 3.1 (regardless of DOS operating system), OS/2 2.1 or SCO ODT 3.0—which all support Windows 3.1 applications. ODT 3.0, with a few exceptions, fully supports Windows applications from its X-Windows environment.

I have been told by at least one vendor (Corel) that *all* new Intel-based 32-bit development will be done generically, with only the drivers and any specific operating system requirements to be added later. This tells me (wow, how perceptive!) that 32-bit operating systems are here and will continue to be the operating systems of the future.

WHICH SYSTEM(S) SHOULD YOU LEARN?

So, which operating system should you learn? You should start by first learning Windows 3.1. This graphics-based (GUI) knowledge is directly transferable to everything else because of Windows 3.1's huge success. Then, I think that you will be safe by learning any one of these 32-bit operating systems. If you know at least one now, say, OS/2, then it probably would not be a bad idea to learn another. Which one you should learn depends on your particular circumstance. People in manufacturing and financial-related industries, for example, should learn UNIX and be conversant in POSIX.

Those of us with at least 70MB of free hard disk, enough RAM and a fast CPU can start exploring Windows NT. Windows NT, is in a word, a *hog*. But, it can only get better, and I believe that Microsoft has a potential winner here

once they shake out all of the bugs. Windows NT, incidentally, is by far the *easiest* system to install because it looks at the hardware attached and loads most drivers automatically. It requires little human intervention, giving the installer time to do other things.

OS/2 2.1 is good. IBM is busily expanding the applications base on this robust, stable platform. Distributed Computing Environment (DCE) is now being "evaluated" by sites that need open systems capability. CICS OS/2 2.0 can be a winner if IBM can convince customers and developers to embrace CICS as a client/server model.

Will Windows NT as a file server blow Novell NetWare, IBM's LAN Server and UNIX's Network File Server (NFS), etc. out of the water? I really don't know and really don't care. Personally, I doubt it, because free enterprise will not allow that to happen. So, I think that someone who is preparing for the future should concentrate on one system

and then glance over the others that seem to have the best chances for success.

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No one person knows everything, but people who are staying abreast of industry trends will remain valuable. Someone who knows IBM mainframe operating systems intimately will have no problem learning other operating systems if she/he removes the natural bias and opens her/his mind to the other possibilities.

One way to stay abreast of the industry is by reading the technical material provided in NaSPA's *IN-DEPTH Reports: 370/390 Operating Systems and Computing Solutions*. NaSPA also provides another source of information, *PC Systems & Support*, which is for professionals who are interested in learning more about PC distributed systems. To find out more about how to obtain *PC Systems & Support*, please contact (414) 423-2420 Ext. 116.

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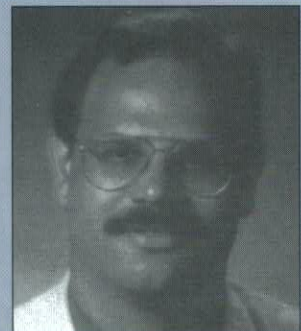
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Stephen Force is a contributing editor and technical advisor to *IN-DEPTH Report* and an independent consultant.



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