



BY BRIAN DIPERT, SENIOR TECHNICAL EDITOR

## The turn of Apple's worm: Success accelerates its stumbles

**W**hen the news of Apple's move to Intel became official three-plus years ago, I remember that two sequential thoughts rapidly flew through my head: (1) Wow, this is going to really improve Apple's hardware competitiveness (cost, performance, and power consumption), translating to some impressive market-share growth over the next few years when coupled with the security vulnerabilities of competitor Microsoft's Windows XP, and (2) Wow, Apple's in trouble. The higher they climb, the harder they tend to fall.

I realize that these two statements are seemingly contradictory. I've followed Apple to one degree or another through my *EDN* career (more so in recent times). Before that, I also interacted with the company in my role as an applications engineer and manager with Intel's flash-memory group. My consistent impression of Apple, which others have also documented over the years, is one of a company immersed in a culture of control and secrecy. The origins of this culture can be traced to Chief Executive Officer Steve Jobs.

Apple's historically tight grasp on hardware, operating system, and applications suites, these suites often to the exclusion of third-party "partners" (just ask Adobe, for example), has led to a comparatively stable computing platform as compared with the Windows alternative. But the resultant dearth of hardware, software, and peripheral options (again, versus Windows) has also historically acted as a market-share cap. Now, however, a critical mass of consumers are fed

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up with Windows. Apple hardware is speedier, "battery-stingier," and more price-friendly than it's ever been, thereby creating a "perfect storm" for the company—but one that'll capsize it if it's not careful.

Paranoia was perhaps acceptable when Apple sold its products to only a few-market-share-percentage points'

worth of perennial loyalists. Now, however, Apple is targeting a much larger market of Windows converts, who expect Windows-reminiscent ecosystem diversity. These converts also expect a more stable software experience than could be found in their Windows past, but they don't realize that the two aspirations are mutually exclusive.

I own almost as much OS X-powered hardware as I do Windows-based gear, so I feel qualified to comment that the blizzard of regularly appearing Apple-operating-system and -application patches is at least as heavy as that on the Windows side of the house, if not more so. And just as with Windows, Apple-offered updates regularly go awry, get pulled (but not in time for early adopters, who end up with DOA hardware as a result), patched, and re-posted.

As the OS X ecosystem expands, Apple will out of necessity rely increasingly on peripheral drivers and other code supplied by third parties—third-party code that is at the core of most of the Windows stumbles that users regularly and incorrectly blame on Microsoft. And to that point, hypocrisy is at the root of my early-August DNS (Domain Name System) diatribe (see the original post at [www.edn.com/080918ed1](http://www.edn.com/080918ed1)). Apple's TV commercials, for example, gloatingly make fun of Windows' "blue screen of death," security shortcomings, and other issues. Yet, based on early indications in this era of the iPod halo effect, I see no evidence that Apple will do any better in this regard; if anything, I'll wager that the converse will be the case.**EDN**

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