HASTA LA VISTA
MICROSOFT AND THE VISTA OPERATING SYSTEM

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Introduction

Jim Allchin, an executive in the Platform Product and Service Group, responsible for operating system development, walked into Bill Gates' office in July 2004 to deliver bad news about the Longhorn operating system. "It's not going to work," said Allchin to Gates, Chairman of the Board and Steve Ballmer, CEO. Longhorn was too complex to run properly. The news got worse with reports that the team would have to start over. Mr. Gates, known for his directness and temperament, insisted the team take more time until everything worked. Upset over the mess, Gates said, "Hey, let's not throw things out we shouldn't throw out. Let's keep things in that we can keep in," The executives agreed to reserve a final decision until Mr. Ballmer returned from a business trip (Guth, 2005).

Over time it became clear that Longhorn had to start from scratch and remove all the bells and whistles that made the system so complex. After Bill Gates reluctantly agreed, the change was announced to Microsoft employees on August 26, 2004 and the new development process began in September 2004 (Guth, 2005).

Often technology-oriented businesses have a more difficult time understanding the nuances of marketing because of the complex nature of the products/services. Nevertheless marketing is important and understanding customer needs becomes central to success. Microsoft is an organization that is not known for marketing. In at least one instance they failed to effectively execute a new product introduction, namely the Vista Operating System (originally codenamed Longhorn).

Background

Microsoft, a name derived from "microcomputer" and 'software", was founded April 4, 1975 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, by Bill Gates and Paul Allen. They studied together at Lakeside Prep School. Microsoft's first success was related to the development of operating systems. In

1980, Microsoft signed an agreement with IBM, which resulted in all IBM computers being sold with MS-DOS ("A Success Story Called," 2008).

Recognizing the potential success of its operating system.[1], Microsoft was able to market it outside the IBM agreement, which represented a financial success for the company. In 1981, Microsoft became an incorporated business, with Bill Gates as president and CEO, and Paul Allen as Executive Vice President. In 1986, the company relocated to Redmond, Washington and went public. In 1982, Paul Allen developed Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a form of cancer, and left Microsoft in 1983. Although he distanced himself from the company he remained on the board of directors until he officially resigned in November 2000. At that time he was asked to remain as a senior strategy advisor to the company's executives ("Paul Allen to Take New Role," 2000).

Microsoft started as a technology-centric company that may not have understood the product planning, development and marketing processes. Microsoft began introducing office products, such as Microsoft Works, and Microsoft Office, with applications like Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and others. The Windows Operating System family was released in 1990, and successive versions such as Windows 95, 98, 2000, and XP followed.

Successful companies are often in various phases of new product development. Sometimes companies pay more attention to the technological aspects of the product and lose sight of consumer wants, needs and feedback. Early on Microsoft touted the technological superiority of Vista. They were very confident the operating system would be a success. Microsoft's entry into the business world began with business-to-business marketing. As Microsoft grew they began to sell to the final consumer (retail). This may have led to a lack of understanding the differences in needs and wants between business customers and final consumers.

In January 2009, Microsoft Corp. announced the previous quarter's revenue of $16.63 billion, which represented a two percent (2%) increase over the same period the prior year. The price of a Microsoft share was estimated at $16 ("Microsoft Reports Second-Quarter," n.d.). Microsoft recognized that the majority of their most popular software programs did not have smooth and speedy launches. They were successful despite the difficulties in part because of their relationships with developers, who appreciated the development tools provided by Microsoft operating systems.

In January of 2000, Bill Gates announced he was stepping down as Microsoft's CEO, leaving his seat to Steven A. Ballmer. Gates remained Chairman of the Board of Directors.

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[1] An operating system is an interface between hardware and applications running on a computer. The operating system (OS), the core of almost all computers, is responsible for the management of activities and sharing of the resources of the computer. Common contemporary operating systems are Microsoft Windows, Mac OS, Linux, BSD, and Solaris. Microsoft Windows has a significant majority of the market share in the desktop and laptop computer markets. To keep up with the technological changes and user requirements, Microsoft has updated or released new versions of their OS periodically every three to four years.

Vista Operating System

The Vista operating system cost six billion dollars to develop (Kingsley-Hughes, 2010) and was launched January 2007 by Microsoft, Inc. The eighth (8th) operating system under the Windows signature, Vista, was launched with anticipation and expectation from the public, particularly since the operating system release was delayed on several occasions due to technical difficulties (Fried, 2006). The development of Vista was completed November 8, 2006. After initial development of Vista, it was released in stages to computer hardware and software manufacturers, business customers, and retail channels. Vista was released to manufacturing (RTM) in November 2006. Once released to manufacturing, industry partners (PC makers, device manufacturers and software developers) completed applications and other products to make it available for final consumer availability (White, 2006). Microsoft had originally hoped to have the consumer versions of the operating system available worldwide in time for Christmas 2006, but the company needed more time to prepare for the release and the date was pushed back to January 2007. The worldwide launch took place January 30, 2007, after the holiday season, thus missing out on sales during the busiest time of the year. Jim Allchin resigned on the day that Vista was released to consumers, which left Kevin Johnson in charge of the Platforms and Services Division (Microsoft, 2007).

Windows XP, Vista's predecessor, launched in 2001, was patched and serviced on numerous occasions. By launching Vista, Microsoft felt it was rendering the service and effectiveness customers needed and wanted. The launch did not go as Microsoft expected. Due to problems with Vista, many customers who had purchased new computers decided to downgrade to Windows XP instead of buying a new machine with Vista (Trembly, 2008).

In a survey conducted by *PC World* magazine in April 2008, 71 percent of PC users reported they ran Windows XP, versus 17 percent who used Vista. To counterattack these trends, Microsoft announced they would stop selling Windows XP in June 2008.

Problems Emerge

To develop large software programs, engineers bring together new, unfinished features into a single "build" which is a prototype used to test how these features work together. With up to 4,000 engineers writing code each day, testing the Longhorn build became nearly impossible. The complexity of the build required manually searching through thousands of lines of code to uncover problems. In 2003 Allchin brought on Brian Valentine and Amitabh Srivastava to help turn around Longhorn. Upfront the team knew that rivals such as Google and Mozilla Foundation were developing test versions of software at a faster pace than Microsoft. Mozilla Foundation even beat Microsoft to market with browser features that had been planned for Longhorn. Feature creep is when too many features are added to a product that make it overly complicated. This happened with Vista. The Longhorn team began a new development process in September 2004 to streamline the system (Guth, 2005). The name was changed from Longhorn to Vista in July 2005 and a beta test involving hundreds of thousands of people and companies was undertaken. The first beta test involved the Microsoft Developer Network's

(MSDN) 500,000 subscribers and TechNet subscribers. The second beta test was available for download to all users from Microsoft's website.

One of the objectives of Vista was to improve the security of the operating system. According to Bill Gates, "If you look at our investment in the next version of Windows, security would jump out as the thing we've spent the most time on" (Ricadela, 2006). Although there were positive early reviews of Vista, (Cross, 2008) the operating system was also the target of technical criticism. Among the customers' complaints about Vista, the most relevant were related to the expensive hardware requirements needed to run Vista and the difficulty in defining which Vista version was the best option to purchase ("Microsoft Website," n.d.). In February 2009, Microsoft had to deploy an emergency patch to counteract a Vista flaw that would allow an attacker to gain control over the windows-based system (Rathbone, 2007).
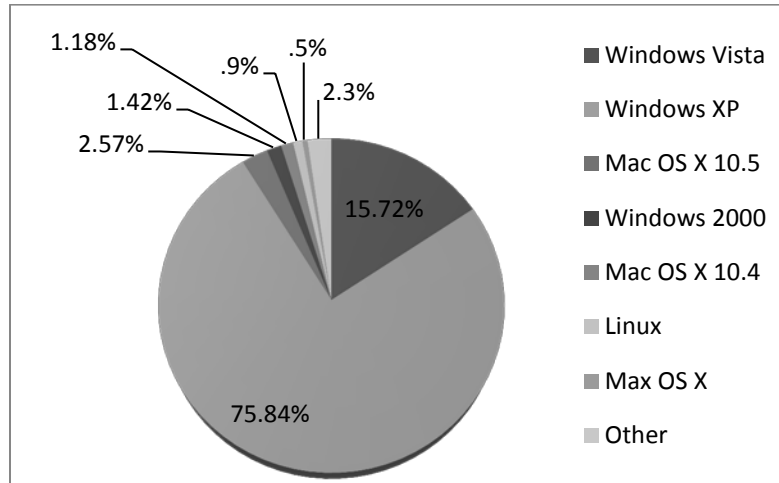
On the subject of Windows' developmental short-comings, Jim Allchin, Co-President, Platform Products and Services Group, Microsoft, realized they were not meeting customer needs and stated:

> "I am not sure how the company lost sight of what matters to our customers, business and home, the most, but in my view we lost our way. I think our teams lost sight of what bug-free means, what resilience means, what full scenarios mean, what security means, what performance means, how important current applications are, and really understanding what the most important problems our customers face are" (Gutmann, 2007).

Customers' perceptions of Vista as "complicated" were exploited by Apple's "Get a Mac" advertising campaign launched in 2006, that focused on problems common to PC's such as compatibility with other technologies, virus vulnerability, networking issues, etc. and the ads highlighted Mac's "hipness", adaptability and virus resistance ("15 Short Ads," n.d.). Microsoft had a difficult time responding to Apple's campaign due to the technical problems and a lack of an integrated marketing communication response.

In addition, despite being on the market for two years, consumers preferred Microsoft's previous operating system. According to Market Share (see chart), as of January 2009, two years after Vista was introduced, Vista owned 15.72 percent of the operating system market, headed by Windows XP with 75.84 percent. Mac owned 4.25 percent, combining its MAC OS 10.5, MAC OS 10.4 and MAC OS X ("Market Share by Net," 2009). A small group of Vista users were satisfied with the new OS but many more were not. Cnet called Vista one of the "biggest blunders in technology" (Reisinger, 2007) and PC magazine outlined 11 reasons why Vista is a failure (Dvorak, 2008).

Figure 1 - Market Share – January 2009

(Source: NetMarketShare – January 2009 - http://marketshare.hitslink.com/report.aspx?
qprid=10&qpmr=24&qpdt=1&qpct=3&qpcal= 1&qptimeframe=M&qpsp=120&qpnp=1)

Vista Description

The Vista OS was developed with technological improvements and business customers in mind.
There were many features added but Microsoft did not communicate the rationale and purpose of
these additions. The features were not adequately converted to consumer benefits. Windows
Vista contained many new features and changes from previous versions on Windows OS such as:
an updated graphical user interface and visual style (Windows Aero), improved searching
features, new multimedia creation tools (Windows DVD Maker), and redesigned networking,
audio, print, and display sub-systems. Vista was also intended to increase communication
between computers on a home network via peer-to-peer technology to provide easy file sharing
between computers and devices. One of the main improvements of Vista from the previous
operating system was security. Previously, Windows XP was criticized for its security
vulnerabilities and susceptibility to malware, and viruses. Developing Windows Vista, Microsoft
concentrated on eliminating all flaws associated with Windows XP and it was released to
customers as a fixed and well-developed product.

Computers capable of running Windows Vista were marked as "Vista Capable" because of high
hardware requirements of Vista (Table 1).

Table 1: Windows Vista Requirements vs. Windows XP

	Windows XP	Windows Vista
Processor	233 MHz	800 MHz
Memory (RAM)	128 MB	512 MB
Graphics memory	8 MB	32 MB
Graphics card	Super VGA or higher	DirectX 9.0 capable
Hard Drive capacity	10 GB	20 GB
Hard Drive free space	1.5 GB	15 GB
Other Drives	CD-ROM	DVD-ROM

Source: Gateway website. Windows XP System Requirements. Retrieved on February 29, 2009 from
http://support.gateway.com/s/software/misc/SUPPAGE01su136.shtml

Vista Features

The following summarizes some of Vista's features.

- **Windows Aero.** The new interface that was intended to be cleaner and more aesthetically looking than previous versions of Windows. New transparencies, live thumbnails, live icons, and animations were provided to the end-users.

- **Windows Shell.** The new look of Windows shell was significantly different from Windows XP. It offered a new range of organization, navigation, and search features. The preview pane allowed users to see thumbnails of files and view the content of documents. The button "Start" was replaced by a blue Windows Pearl button.

- **Instant Search.** (Also introduced as *search as you type*) this new feature provided faster service to users and easy access from the "pearl" button and in the main Windows Explorer window.

- **Backup and Restore Center:** This application gave users the ability to schedule periodic backups of files on their computer and restore files from earlier created backups. A feature of complete PC backup was also available. This feature backed up the entire computer as an image onto a hard drive or DVD disk. In a short period of time the whole system could be restored from the image of the PC including installed software and documents that were saved on the PC prior to the complete PC backup.

As Table 2 shows, Vista had several editions, with price increasing as the functions increased.

Table 2. Vista Prices

	Home Basic	Home Premium	Business	Ultimate
Suggested Retail Price	$199.95	$259.95	$299.95	$319.95
Source: Compare Windows Vista editions. Retrieved from Windows Website December 2009 from: http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-vista/compare-editions/default.aspx				

Criticism of Vista

Windows Vista received a number of negative critiques and assessments. Microsoft ignored much of this and did not adequately respond. Criticism included development time, hardware requirements, pricing and usability (Garfield, 2009: Johnson, 2007; Lohr, 2008). Reviewers also noted some similarity between Vista's Aero interface and Apple's Aqua interface for the Mac OS (Sidener, 2007).

Since the launch of Vista, the product had a continuous driver problem. According to many users, the quality of Vista's drivers was poor (Lohr, 2008). Developers of Vista tried to include many drivers into the OS, but users complained they had to reinstall the correct driver that came with the original hardware part.

A good example would be Nvidia's GeForce 8800 graphics card, which was launched with the mark "Designed for Windows Vista". After the installation of the card, many people complained that the Nvidia drivers didn't work well in Vista. The sound card manufacturer, Creative, had similar problems with the drivers ("Vista 4 Beginners," n.d.).

Application compatibility created negative opinions about Vista. Several applications didn't work correctly or could not be installed. Applications such as CD/DVD burning utilities, VPN applications, virtualization solutions and/or security suites typically had problems during the installation process. The cause of application compatibility issues appeared to be focused on either Vista's new security features or the poor design of the installer ("Vista 4 Beginners," n.d.).

Marketing

In July, 2005 Microsoft officially announced that Vista was to be the name of their next operating system and they released a beta version to testers. As previously stated, Vista was known under the developmental codename Longhorn (Shultz, 2006). After five years of delays and high expectations, Microsoft quietly began to advertise the soon-to-be released Windows Vista in December of 2006 (Silverman, 2006). The company devoted $500 Million to the advertising campaign for Vista. John B. Williams, general manager-Windows global communications said, "Awareness is not enough. The goal for this campaign [is to] get at the heart of excitement (Baker, 2007)."

The initial advertisements focused on the upgraded visual performance of Vista. Coinciding with the conventional advertising were a series of viral ads featuring comedian Demetri Martin. These were launched in early 2007. To direct viewers to these online ads, commercial spots were placed on television. These commercials prompted viewers to go to www.clearification.com and www.theiap.org to view the viral videos ("Hello You're a Person," n.d.).

The ads soon faced stiff competition from Apple Computers' "Get a Mac" campaign. The Apple campaign's website detailed the compatibility of Apple computers with Windows programs and technology. It also featured a number of "I'm a Mac, I'm a PC" ads which comically attacked Vista's shortcomings. These ads featured John Hodgman as the "PC guy" and Justin Long as the "Mac guy" ("Get a Mac," n.d.). The ads compared the shortcomings of the PC versus the innovative Apple. Later ads directed the comparison to Vista's defects. Created by TBWA\Media Arts, the campaign ran from 2006 to 2009 and the advertisements were shown in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Japan.

Microsoft responded by developing the Mojave Experiment. The Mojave Experiment ad campaign featured television commercials, which once again prompted users to go to their website, www.mojaveexperiment.com. The experiment was a single-blind test in which subjects believed they were using a new Windows operating system called Mojave. In actuality, the operating system was Windows Vista (Fried, 2008a). The commercials and website promoted Vista as an easy to use, highly attractive system via the subjects' testimonials.

To further the merits of the Mojave Experiment, a $300 million ad campaign was launched to change the public's overwhelmingly negative perception of Vista. The first ad ran for two weeks leading into early September 2008. The ad featured Microsoft founder Bill Gates and comedian Jerry Seinfeld purchasing shoes in an unusual fashion. However, the commercial did not speak about Vista at all and drew further disdain from the public (Lai, 2008b). Microsoft pulled the failed campaign.

The next phase of advertising was a response to Apple's "Get a Mac" (also known as "I'm a Mac, I'm a PC") ad campaign. The commercials began with a look-alike of John Hodgman from the Apple ad. The look-alike stated, "Hello, I'm a PC, and I've been made into a stereotype." The ad featured people of all ethnicities, ages, professions, and lifestyles professing their PC identity. These commercials never mentioned the name Vista (Lai, 2008a). Apple fired back with the "Bean Counter" commercial as part of the "I'm a Mac, I'm a PC" series. The ad showed John Hodgman making a large pile of money for advertising Vista and a very small pile for fixing Vista. The commercial concludes with Justin Long inciting John Hodgman to take all the money out of fixing Vista and placing it in the advertising pile by stating, "…do you really think that amount of money can fix Vista?" (Lai, 2008c)

Customer Response

Prior to its release, most PC users were excited and eagerly awaiting their turn to run the new operating system. This changed, almost immediately, once Windows Vista finally went public in January of 2007. Thousands of complaints about the product were expressed via the Internet. The most common complaints were those concerning compatibility issues, excessive pop-up menu and dialog boxes and security problems. Corporate customers were refusing to upgrade

from XP to Vista. Said Will Weider, a computer manager for a chain of Wisconsin hospitals, "I wouldn't put on Vista if it was free" (Graham, 2008).

In a feature called "Why I Don't like Vista," Andy Rathbone, the author of "Vista for Dummies," voiced complaints regarding problems with the security offered by Vista. He explained that Vista was released with a major flaw that left hackers the ability to completely take control of one's system and most of the third-party security programs are not compatible with Vista, forcing those companies to start from scratch with new, untested defenses (Pirillo, 2007).

Beside the one major defect in the original version, Vista actually was a secure operating system. They achieved this by adding many pop-up menu and dialog boxes for anything requiring administrative rights, which Windows called the "User Account Control." Nevertheless, these boxes popped up asking permission to perform nearly every task, including changing a font. While they did make the system secure, they mostly annoyed the average user to the point where they turned the User Account Control off (Rathbone, 2007).

The compatibility of Vista was another complaint. Users complained that many programs could not be run on Vista. This was such an issue that a class action lawsuit was filed against Microsoft. The suit stated that many "Vista capable systems" in fact were not (Rathbone, 2007). These are only a few examples of thousands of complaints that could be found on the Internet in early 2007. All of these complaints obviously gave Vista a bad reputation.

One common factor or thread that ran amongst the complaints was how much better everything was with Vista's predecessor, Windows XP. This ended up being the most common alternative for PC buyers. At first this was difficult as XP was essentially removed from the retail shelves (Kotadia, 2007). In response to a larger number of complaints, Microsoft altered its practices and allowed companies to continue selling systems running XP. *InfoWorld*, an online magazine waged a "Save XP" campaign, collecting over 200,000 signatures (Gruman, 2008). Due to customer demand, Microsoft agreed to provide full technical support for Windows XP through 2009, and limited support through 2014 (McCracken, 2008; "Microsoft to Stop," 2008).

Dell took advantage of this and allowed customers to downgrade from Vista to XP with no extra charge. HP, Gateway and others sold machines with XP on them nearly a year after the introduction of Vista (Fried, 2008b). In early January 2008 one computer store owner stated that 40% of the units being sold still ran XP. Some companies were selling computers with Vista, but including the disks to install XP in the package. These practices decreased after January 31, 2008, when Microsoft ordered many computer makers and retailers to stop offering XP based programs (Kotadia, 2007). This led to a large number of people who were "stuck" with the Vista systems.

Conclusion

Microsoft took other actions to try and raise customer satisfaction with its new product. Microsoft ran a series of service packs, which fixed many of the compatibility and security problems. By 2008, Microsoft stated that 98% of computer products were now supported by

Vista. Many reviews written after 2008 are actually positive, praising Microsoft for fixing its problems. Unfortunately, the damage was already done. As a result of frustrated customers, Apple's sales went up substantially – as much as 51% compared to a previous quarter (Graham, 2008). Microsoft was unable to undo the negative perception of Vista. After a while, Microsoft gave up on Vista to promote the release of its newest operating system, Windows 7.

During the introduction of Windows 7 at the All Things Digital technology conference, Bill Gates, Microsoft Chairman, admitted there were many lessons to be learned from Vista. He also continued to defend Vista saying, "There's a lot of things that were very well-received in Vista..." (Baig, 2008).

Microsoft management was overconfident in their abilities to deliver another operating system that was a success. Microsoft learned from their mistakes and made adjustments in their marketing strategy. For example, in 2008, Microsoft developed a new mission statement which focused on enabling people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential. This mission statement was an attempt to change from their persistent technology-centric orientation to relationship marketing. In addition, Steve Ballmer, CEO, empowered employees to make independent decisions and he incorporated corporate values into performance reviews. The sales force, engineers and managers were ordered to improve the quality of the products and services to alleviate the frustration customers had experienced ("Microsoft Marketing Strategy," 2008).

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