



My Humble Opinions On Windows NT vs. OS/2

Software Reviews

Ronald B. Krisko

Until recently, personal computer users did not have much of a choice about which operating system to run. Initially and for a long time since then, IBM's DOS(tm) or Microsoft's MSDOS(tm) was the only thing available. Now, there are many options including: Microsoft's Windows NT version 3.5(tm); IBM's OS/2 version 3.0(tm), also known as Warp(tm); and various forms of UNIX(tm). Today, I am going to review Microsoft's Windows NT verses OS/2.

I am currently running three operating systems on my machine: MSDOS version 6.22 (tm), Windows NT version 3.5, and OS/2 version 3.0. I will not bother mentioning MSDOS anymore because it is not even in the league of the other multiprocessing operating systems. My machine is a Zeos 486/66 EISA system with a 1.2 Gig. Seagate SCSI hard drive, 16 MB of RAM, Toshiba 3401 CDROM drive, Creative Labs SoundBlaster 16 ASP, 3.5" and 5.25" floppy drives, Diamond Stealth SVGA video card with 1 MB of vRAM, Hayes Optima 144 Data/FAX, Colorado Trakker 250 MB tape backup, and Zeos SVGA monitor.

Now that I have gotten the somewhat boring technical talk out of the way, I can get into the juicy part of this article. The reason that I have described my system is because it is mostly made up of ``popular" and ``common" components. When a software package says that it supports certain sound cards, CDROMs, hard drives, etc.

then I know that my components are probably on the list so it should work on my system with no trouble.

For those out there who know what ``in theory it should work" really means in the computer world, you know to expect the worst usually. IBM's OS/2 version 2.0(tm) was just such a product. After trashing my hard drive eight times trying to install and use it, I sent it back to IBM and got my money back. After that I had a bad taste in my mouth when it came to OS/2. After working with OS/2 2.1(tm), I saw that IBM really was committed to cleaning up what they had broken in version 2.0. It still was unstable at times and could crash for no reason on my system (and others) when running its own native OS/2 built-in applications. When OS/2 3.0 came out, I was stunned at its new look, feel, and stability. To make a long story short, it is stable on ``some" systems, but on my system I have crashed it numerous times installing it, updating software on it, adding new features to it, and simply running some of its built in applications like the IBM Internet connection program. Now, if it just crashed, that would be okay, but it crashed so hard that when I rebooted, it would not reboot correctly and had to be re-installed. Come on IBM, I like your products and want to believe in them, but when they act like this then it makes them very hard to work with, believe in, and recommend to our friends and colleagues. Actually, at this moment, OS/2 on my system is in a current ``crashed" state, and I have not gotten around to re-installing it yet.

What is good about OS/2 version 3.0? Its price, its little added features and Internet programs, and its Macintosh-looking interface that is much easier and natural to use than Windows 3.11(tm), Windows for Work Groups 3.11(tm), and Windows NT by a long shot, if you already own DOS(tm) and Windows 3.1 or higher. For ``most" PC's, OS/2 should use your system's resources wisely without much hassle, but you must always remember that you could have that one system, like mine seems to be, that OS/2 just hates and refuses to run correctly on.

So what about Windows NT version 3.5? I have successfully crashed Windows NT version 3.1(tm) maybe twice in total and only crashed version 3.5 once to date. I run communication and FAX tools via the modem and over the Internet through a PPP connection, word processing programs, spreadsheet programs, desktop publishing programs, programming language compilers, some games, and educational tools. With all of those there and with sometimes maybe four of those running at the same time, Windows NT may slow down significantly (since I only have one processor), but it

keeps on going and trying to keep the time slices equal for each process. Just like OS/2 version 3.0 only, Windows NT has always been a 32 bit multiprocessing operating system since its creation with version 3.1. It is just because of those features that it can keep everything running without crashing. Almost all of my programs are just simple 16 bit applications or DOS programs, but it handles them so well that I look forward to someday purchasing 32 bit native Windows NT applications that will simply fly!

What problems do I have with Window NT? To start with, its old, dare I say ancient, interface can definitely use a major overhaul to make it look more like the Macintosh and IBM OS/2 3.0 interfaces. The old Windows' interface is hard to work with and not at all natural for the normal user. The other problem that I had was with its install. Since I had the previous version already installed and working, I tried to simply install it like it says and it worked (sort of) for about a half of a hour and then crashed hard. I ended up cleaning off that partition and re-installing Windows NT from scratch. Since then, I have not had any troubles with it at all and have not crashed it. The original price is higher than OS/2 is selling for now, but the cost is quickly approaching a close race.

How much are they? Windows NT 3.5 on CD costs about \$280.00, but OS/2 3.0 on CD only costs about \$80.00. This may sound like a big difference, but you have to realize that you must already own DOS and Windows 3.1 or higher before you can use OS/2. If you add in the cost of MS-DOS 6.22 upgrade package of about \$50.00 and Windows 3.11 for about \$90.00 or Windows for Workgroups 3.11 for about \$130.00, the total cost for OS/2 shoots up to either around \$220.00 or \$260.00. The two operating systems now do not look that far apart in price. I got all of these prices from page 17 of the February 1995 issue of the *Computer Shopper*.

How about documentation? Both operating systems are fair in their included printed documentation. It could be better and there could be more, but both companies are pushing for people to use on-line documentation so they have include less paper documentation. What they both fail to remember is that the system has to be up and running and configured correctly before the on-line documentation will work. Do not fear though, because both companies do offer free limited phone support that starts when you make your first call to them so if you get stuck installing, give them a call and they will walk you through it. With either of them, plan on staying on hold for a while before you actually get to talk to a real person, but be patient, do not panic, and everything will be fine. I have been through it many times before so I know what I am

talking about here. I am not too proud to give them a call and say that I am confused about a problem I have so neither should you.

What are the system requirements for each? For x86 uni- and multi-processor systems, Windows NT requires at least a 386-25 processor, 12 MB of RAM (with 16 recommended), 75 MB of freed hard drive space, VGA or better video support, and a mouse. For RISC machines, it requires 16 MB of RAM, 92 MB of hard drive space, similar video requirements, and a mouse. OS/2 requires a 386SX or higher processor, 4 MB of RAM, 35 MB of hard disk space, VGA video support, Microsoft Windows 3.1 or 3.11 or Windows for Workgroups version 3.1 or 3.11, a mouse, and 30 MB or additional hard drive space for the OS/2 BonusPak. Windows NT obviously requires a more robust system, but it is because it is such a large robust operating system with many different features built in.

What programs for what operating systems can each of these two operating systems run? OS/2 can run OS/2 applications, most DOS applications, and most Windows applications. Windows NT can run Windows NT applications, OS/2 version 1.x applications, most DOS applications, most Windows applications, and POSIX applications. POSIX is essentially a version of UNIX. Yes, all of these operating systems are supported under Windows NT as compared to the few supported by OS/2. The funny thing is that Windows NT even supports OS/2 applications and file formats, but OS/2, as yet, does not support Windows NT applications or file formats. What is OS/2 waiting for?

What did I find out from my experiences that most people do not know about? Windows NT reads all of its partitions, devices, etc. as it is booting up so it creates its internal tables (i.e. device tables, partition tables, etc.) on the fly and does not scream at a change made when it was not running. OS/2 on the other hand keeps that one megabyte partition for a specific reason. It stores a copy of the partition table in there along with the menuing system for the ``Boot Manager." It uses this copy to force everything back to what it was when OS/2 knew about it (i.e. if there are partition table changes that it did not know about then it forces them back to what it knew about without even asking you about it). I found this out when I was making a partition under Windows NT, exited, booted OS/2 and noticed that it disappeared. I did it again, exited, and booted back up to Windows NT to find out that it disappeared again. I tried it quite a few times until I disabled the ``Boot Manager" for OS/2, created the partition, exited Windows NT, rebooted and booted back into Windows NT

to find that the partition was miraculously still there. I then tried one more time the same way I did it the first time with the OS/2 ``Boot Manager" enabled and when I got back into Windows NT, the partition disappeared again. After much creative thinking, I found that I had to create the partition, exit Windows NT, boot OS/2 from disk so that I could create a new ``Boot Manager" program on my drive, and immediately exit the OS/2 install after this and reboot the machine. This took care of the problem. It is like trying to get from Ohio to Pennsylvania via Texas and Florida, but it worked and I was happy and was happy to share it with anybody else who was having similar problems and could not figure it out yet.

What does it all mean and what do I recommend? If you are regular user with a 386, 486, or Pentium who is not on a network and not running any ``special" or ``odd" software or hardware and already own DOS and Windows 3.1 or higher, save yourself some money and purchase OS/2 3.0 to pump up your old system. I guarantee that you will see a significant increase in performance your machine. If you do happen to run into some major problems during the first few days that really discourage you from moving to a new operating system now, simply take advantage of IBM's money-back guarantee. Let them know what problems you had so they can fix them in future upgrades. If you are a hard core user with a very ``pumped up" system, whether it be x86, Alpha, or other processor, are on or off a network, and have a few extra dollars to spend on an operating system, go for Windows NT version 3.5. Just like IBM's offer, Microsoft also has some sort of money-back guarantee. If for some reason you are not satisfied with the product or are having too much difficulty with it during the first few days, simply return it and let them know why you returned it and were unhappy with it.

As you may or may not be able to tell by now, I am an avid Microsoft Windows NT user and have been for almost two years. I started with IBM's OS/2 but ended up with Windows NT. Although my personal choice was Windows NT, I have used, installed, set up, and fixed OS/2 for people for over a year as well. If you decide to take advantage of these new multiprocessing operating systems, I wish you the best of luck. In some cases a good friend who is a knowledgeable computer user may come in handy when trying to set up and customize these systems correctly. No matter which way you decide to go, I strongly urge you to take hold of one of today's new operating systems so that you can get the most use and power out of your current computer system.