

= iLoo =

The iLoo (short for Internet loo) was a cancelled Microsoft project to develop a Wi @-@ Fi Internet @-@ enabled portable toilet . The iLoo , which was to debut at British summer festivals , was described as being a portable toilet with wireless broadband Internet , an adjustable plasma screen , a membrane wireless keyboard , a six @-@ channel speaker system , and toilet paper embossed with popular web site addresses . The iLoo was also to have an extra screen and keyboard on the outside , and was to be guarded . It was intended as the next in a series of successful initiatives by MSN UK which sought to introduce the internet in unusual locations , including MSN Street , MSN Park Bench and MSN Deckchair .

The project was announced by MSN UK on April 30 , 2003 , and was widely ridiculed before being declared a hoax by Microsoft on May 12 . On May 13 , another Microsoft press release stated that although the project had not been a hoax , it had been cancelled because it would do little to promote the MSN brand . There has since been speculation as to whether the project was cancelled for fear of being sued by Andrew Cubitt , who had invented the similarly named product " i @-@ Loo " . The iLoo was described as a public relations " debacle " by Online Journalism Review .

= = Description = =

The iLoo was designed to be a Wi @-@ Fi Internet @-@ enabled portable toilet that would allow users to surf the internet while using the loo . Internally , the facility would have a broadband connection via wireless 802.11b , a wireless waterproof keyboard , a swivel plasma screen running Windows XP Professional , a 6 @-@ channel surround @-@ sound system beneath the sink , toilet paper embossed with popular URLs , and a suction toilet . Externally , the facility would feature an MSN logo and have a " Hotmail station " with an additional plasma screen and keyboard for waiting consumers . A security guard was to be stationed near the unit to ensure that it was being properly used and to prevent the unit from being stolen . The iLoo was to debut " at a majority of the summer season festivals " . The iLoo was to be deployed only in Britain .

= = Public relations timeline = =

The project was announced on April 30 , 2003 in press release by MSN UK , MSN 's British subsidiary , as part of a " series of MSN.co.uk initiatives which look at the changing nature of how we use the web as it constantly evolves " . The press release stated that :

The UK 's most popular website msn.co.uk is creating the world 's first ? Internet Loo ? . The iLoo will be mobile and is part of MSN 's mission to allow instant logging on ? anytime and any place ? . In time for the summer festival season , MSN is in the process of converting a portable loo to create a unique experience for surfers looking for an alternative to the bog @-@ standard festival loo experience . Users will be able to sit down , undock a wireless keyboard and conveniently access the first ever WWW.C.

The press release also stated that " MSN is also in talks with toilet paper manufacturers to produce special web paper for those in need of URL inspiration " .

News of the iLoo was widely circulated amongst mainstream media . The story became the most @-@ emailed story on Yahoo ! News on May 1 , 2003 , being emailed over 4000 times . The iLoo was widely derided and press coverage subjected MSN and Microsoft to heavy criticism . On May 10 , The Inquirer published a story in which Andrew Cubitt alleged that " Microsoft stole his iLoo idea " from his i @-@ Loo invention . On May 12 , Microsoft announced that the iLoo was a " hoax perpetrated by its British division " calling it an " April Fool 's joke " and issued an apology for the confusion . The Associated Press , however , stated that they had previously received confirmation of the project from two of Microsoft 's PR firms : Waggener Edstrom Worldwide and Red Consultancy . The Seattle Post @-@ Intelligencer also stated that it received confirmation from Waggener Edstrom and was even provided with a schematic drawing . Furthermore , April Fools was almost a month before , and Microsoft had never before released a fake press release .

On May 13 , 2003 , Microsoft retracted the denial , stating that the iLoo had been a legitimate demonstration project that was to be released in Britain for summer music festivals , but had been terminated by Microsoft executives in Redmond , Washington who believed the iLoo was inappropriate with the final decision made by MSN senior vice president David Cole . MSN product manager Lisa Gurry stated that the project " didn 't really map to our global branding objectives " . Microsoft again apologized for the miscommunication stating " the confusion over the legitimacy of this effort was caused by people moving too quickly and who misspoke before gathering all of the relevant information " . Prior to the cancellation , an iLoo prototype was in the " early stages of construction " . MSN allows regional units to design their own marketing campaigns , and the UK division had developed a reputation for innovative campaigns , in this case involving British toilet humour . The iLoo which was designed for the UK as part of a " tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek marketing initiative " was " intended to be the next in line of a number of clever initiatives in the UK involving introducing the internet in interesting locations , including MSN Street , MSN Park Bench and MSN Deckchair " . The previous initiatives were well received . Microsoft stated that no employees were disciplined as a result of the debacle , although the company stated that it would conduct " internal discussions " .

= = Reaction = =

Although the product was not publicly released , many questioned whether " Microsoft had lost its senses " and the product was widely derided . Critics contended that the product was a waste of money and doomed to fail . Concerns were raised about how the iLoo would serve to extend waiting lines , how hygienic it would be to share keyboards in a public loo , and what would happen if the keyboard were to be urinated upon . Critics also questioned whether users would spend enough time in the loo to make use of the internet facilities , noting that " most port @-@ a @-@ potty users stay only long enough to relieve themselves without having to inhale . "

The iLoo , given its toiletry @-@ related nature , subjected MSN and Microsoft to puns and jokes especially since Microsoft 's marketing slogan at the time was " where do you want to go today ? " with the PC being dubbed Pee @-@ C. The Herald Sun wrote that the " iLoo is , unquestionably , very good news ? mainly to journalists with a bottomless pit of laboured bum jokes " while the Seattle Times wrote " now the company has a credibility problem as well as a red face . " Other newspapers issued humorous headlines : Microsoft technology headed for toilet from the San Francisco Chronicle , Toilet mixes zeroes with ones and twos from the Washington Post , and Microsoft 's Gone Potty from The Daily Mirror .

The product has since been studied as an example of a public relations disaster and an example of an internet hoax . Microsoft 's public relations response to the debacle is also considered to be one of the poorest in the company 's history , given Microsoft 's reputation for micro @-@ managing news releases , interviews and promotional events .

The iLoo 's negative publicity drowned out the launch of MSN Radio Plus on May 12 , 2003 . It has since inspired a number of spoofs .

= = i @-@ Loo controversy = =

After reading an article about the iLoo , Andrew Cubitt , inventor of the similarly named i @-@ Loo , wrote to The Inquirer stating that iLoo " sounds remarkably similar ... it now seems that the clever people at Microsoft have cottoned onto the idea and even call it the i @-@ Loo , the same as mine ! " Cubitt went on to say that " mine did everything that the Microsoft one is meant to do , but additionally printed information on toilet paper and didn 't use a keyboard for the interface due to hygiene reasons " . The i @-@ Loo was prototyped by Cubitt as part of his thesis for his 2001 university degree in Product Design and Engineering at Brunel University . In an interview with The Inquirer , he noted " As it was designed at the university , they own the partial rights to the product so they will be watching the Microsoft ' invention ' very closely . "

Microsoft never formally commented on Cubitt 's allegations and instead initially stated the iLoo was

an April 's fool joke . As a result , Cubitt questioned whether this was " a very calculated ploy to destroy competition in its early stages , or is admitting they don 't even know what time of the month it is less embarrassing and ridding them of a potentially expensive situation ! " Cubitt went on to state that " as they have now discredited my idea as a joke , I will never be able to produce the idea " and as such was " consulting my law books now on defamatory statements " . Neither Cubitt , nor Brunel University have taken public legal action against Microsoft pertaining to the i @-@ Loo .

The i @-@ Loo was described as :

The i @-@ Loo internet toilet roll browser is a novel and unique product designed to make best use of the time you spend on the loo ! The product allows you to search the internet whilst sitting on the toilet and print out any web pages you are interested in on your toilet paper. i @-@ Loo brings a whole new meaning to the word downloading . The unit is fixed in front of a toilet on the cubical [sic] wall . The product provides up to date information about new products , daily news and lottery results through an easy to navigate software package . Normal operation of the toilet and paper dispenser is evident .

The i @-@ Loo internet toilet roll browser was featured at the 2003 Daily Mail Ideal Home Show as part of the Future Concepts exhibition in Earls Court , London , where it was nominated for the MFI Bright Sparks 2003 awards . The i @-@ Loo , which was sponsored by Epson Printers , received significant press coverage , and was featured on GMTV as well as various radio shows .

= = Annotations = =