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VIEWPOINT

Proprietary or Not Proprietary

by Pamela G. McIntyre

One of the classic barriers to market entry taught in every MBA class in America is that of making one's product proprietary. This is especially true of the software industry. While Windows has lessened the effects of this to some extent, the war still rages. Companies are bent on backing their customers into a corner, making it so painful to change products that it is more attractive to upgrade a less than efficient product than bear the costs of changing (or converting) to a new one.

I have to smile whenever I come across an article on standards. No doubt a great deal of time and effort goes into developing standards, allegedly for the benefit of everyone involved. Then, a great deal more time and effort goes into making sure that the product is completely incompatible with competing products. The problem here is that this sometimes results in unexpected and very annoying inconveniences for the users.

I want to buy software, install it, and have it work with everything I own immediately. Rarely is that the case. I have graphics that work with one program but not with others unless I convert it. I have software programs that "hang" when run concurrently with other programs. I actually have a problem with Windows disabling the secondary IDE controller in my PC which disables my CD-ROM drive. I had to get a patch off of the manufacturer's web site to "fix" the problem. Having to constantly deal with these things is not the best use of my time.

Winfried Gerum's article on page 16 of this issue focuses on using M to accommodate differences in requirements (specifically units of measure) rather than creating something so different that it is rigid and inflexible. It appears to me that there is a gigantic market for someone who is interested in creating a product whose advantage is that it works with everything else. While Gerum's article deals with units and scale, the same principle applies to language differences (spoken and written), the ability to run under more than one operating system (without having to buy a separate version), compatible graphics formats, standard use of control characters and function keys, etc. Make it flexible.

Proprietary products are not as well accepted as they once were. The customer has gotten a little smarter and so should you. **M**

Welcome to Viewpoint. The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of MTA. Guest writers and responses to columns are welcome and will be printed at the discretion of MTA. Email: MTA@mtechnology.org
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