

# Windows Millennium Edition: What Is It and What Does It Take to Support It?

By **JIM LEISY**

In the middle of 1999, Microsoft formed the Consumer Windows Division (CWD). CWD's mission is to make the home computing experience less complex. The center piece product from this group is Windows Millennium Edition. Based on marketplace tests CWD is attempting to brand the OS as Windows Me. Me or Milly (a nickname provided by another computer-tradepaper columnist) will succeed the current Windows 98, Second Edition.

The product is currently in beta release 3. It is moving pretty close to schedule, too. The guys at CWD are working hard. I recently spotted a release-to-market (RTM) date of June 6th on a web site called Paul Thurrott's SuperSite for Windows. On this site he shares his experiences with Windows Me. He provides details concerning

the hardware he chose to test it on. Though he feels the hardware is typical, I found the amount of RAM on his test machines gigantic compared to what I see in workplace (and certainly the typical home computer).

Franklin Beedle & Associates is also in the beta loop for Windows Me. So I have first hand experience with the installation and performance of the product. Initially, I thought it

made sense to use a Hitachi laptop for my test. It has been a companion on the road for nearly two years. Unfortunately it proved to be a poor choice. Within minutes of launching the installation shield I was invited to leave. While the Hitachi passed the

minimum RAM requirement of 32mb, it failed the clockspeed test. It was deemed to wimpy at 133mhz. Microsoft wants a minimum system clockspeed of 166mhz.

Lucky for me there was a vintage tower available that at some point was updated with a spiffy motherboard, has 64mb of RAM, and a Pentium II chip with a 200mhz clock. I resumed the installation

of Windows Me on this machine. About 15 minutes later I met the next obstacle. While the specifications said 500mb of free disk space would be adequate, I was being prompted to find about a gig and a half to proceed! This computer had a 4 gigabyte hard drive, so

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some judicious removal of programs and files was all that was required to move on with the installation.

Prior versions of Windows earned the slam “plug and pray.” But I must say that Milly has much improved plug and play (PNP) performance. Every device was recognized (SCSI adapter, off-brand modem, network card, and name graphics accelerator card) and the proper drivers matched.

The whole process took almost 40 minutes. During which the system was restarted three times. My interaction in the process was mini-

mal. Mostly I was free to multitask

Since September, I have been using the Windows Millennium Edition machine daily. Around the end of January I started getting an occasional blue screen or it would hang on shut down. But in February the beta refresher arrived and that seems to have cured whatever was ailing the system. Unlike the initial release of Windows 98, when Me goes into sleep mode it easily awakes with a tap on the keyboard.

Windows Me looks and feels like a really good Windows 98.

This is incentive enough for me to upgrade. However the strategy is to give the consumer a better OS platform for multimedia applications and Internet interactivity. These are areas that I can't comment on yet. This machine is an office environment, where we are supposed to work not play (right?).

Probably by July all the major computer stores and mail order computer suppliers (i.e., Dell and Gateway) will be selling Windows Me on most of their computers. So in the not-to-distant future your students will be asking for the OS course to address it.