

Windows 2000— Is It Time to Worry Yet?

By MELISSA STEINEGER

If you've been following the saga of the Windows 2000 release—or even if you've been like most of the non-Gatesian world and yawned past the virtually weekly headlines announcing yet another delay—it seems the time has finally come, sort of.

Microsoft announced in late October that it would release Windows 2000 to manufacturing by the end of the year. The announcement puts a cheerful face on what has been a quagmire for the software giant. By “releasing to manufacturing,” Microsoft makes good on its boast that it would release Windows 2000 by year's end.

Of course, you—like most of the rational world—might have thought “release” signified “release to consumers,” meaning you could trot down to your local software

supermart and pick up a pack. Well, release to manufacturing means the product goes to production—still, it is a release. Release to the retail channel, Microsoft now says, will be Feb. 17—depending on “continued positive feedback from early-adopter customers re-

“This product is not NT. To us, it's a brand-new product.”

garding quality,” which certainly seems to leave plenty of room to wiggle. Still, in the end it will all have been worth it—maybe. Some early testers have found a rather steep (vertical, actually) learning curve. A technology analyst for a national insurance company which is testing parts of Windows 2000 told Information Week, “This product is not NT. To us, it's a brand-new product.”

This brand-new prod-

uct has been a long time (almost) getting here.

Windows 2000—the update to Windows NT—has been in development for about five years. Microsoft began heralding its release more than two years ago with the rollout then scheduled for mid 1998. Of late the company is touting improved application services, increased security and enhanced network growth capabilities for businesses.

Initially, though, Windows 2000 was intended to be the one and only Windows—good for home or corporate. That fell by the wayside when Microsoft discovered what many in America already knew—a lot of us don't want to work when we get home at the end of the 9 to 5. We (or our kids) are looking for a little relaxation, and we want our computer to serve it up.

That means that the enhanced workplace features of Windows 2000 (and Windows 98, for that matter) produce a big yawn from the large and lucrative market of home PC owners who would rather be playing games.

Microsoft discovered that it had missed the mark with its one-size-fits-all solution. It retrenched, and focused Windows 2000 on the business user (leaving for another day the question of what

to do about all the home users who want an operating system that solves their problems).

So is it time to start rethinking your own self for Windows 2000? Here's what the crystal ball shows:

"Microsoft is committed to delivering the best business operating system for the next generation of PC computing, and we are thrilled that customers and partners can build their plans around the gen-

eral availability of Windows 2000," says Deborah Willingham, vice president of the Business Enterprise Division at Microsoft, through the company's press mill. "While we are working closely with the industry to prepare solutions for retail availability in mid-February, we stand firm on our commitment to release Windows 2000 only when our early-adopter customers agree it's ready."

And you can count on that.