DIY

maddog imagines what it would be like to own a Microsoft-certified toilet. *By Jon "maddog" Hall*

Years ago, I wrote an article about taking a shower in a hotel and almost burning myself. The faucet handles in the shower were round and smooth, and with soap on my hands I could not grip the handles to adjust the hot water. I thought to myself that standards in the plumbing industry would allow people to replace the handles on these faucets to give you something to grip. Later, I started thinking that, with no or "proprietary" standards, you would not be able to replace the faucet handles without replacing the pipe out to the street.

Last night, the toilet in my bathroom refused to flush. I knew what was wrong, because on the previous flush the handle had given that characteristic jerk, telling me that it was no longer attached to the flushing mechanism by the little chain.

I could have called a plumber, but that would have been expensive, and I could not have used that toilet until the plumber had a chance to visit me. Instead, I decided to fix the toilet myself. At the hardware store, I found I could buy an assembly to replace every working part of the toilet that was not ceramic for the low-low price of US$ 40, or I could buy a "flapper assembly" for US$ 8, or I could buy the tiny replacement chain for US$ 4.34.

Because the whole assembly was basically fine, I purchased the only thing I really needed – the chain – and threaded it into place. Then, I started thinking about what would have happened if I had purchased a Microsoft toilet.

To begin with, I would have been faced with several standards – all different and not compatible– such as "Chain 2000," "Chain Vista," and "Chain ME." The salesperson would point out that each style of chain would be around for a long while because "so many of that style was made." Of course, after four or five years, Microsoft would stop making Chain XP because it had been replaced by Chain Vista.

Assuming, that I found the proper chain, I would take it home to install it, only to find out that the chain was not a "Customer Installable Unit," and I would need to hire a Microsoft technician to install it. Moreover, I would find that removing the top of the toilet tank had voided the warranty on the toilet, so I would have to pay full price for the time of the technician and a Microsoft-certified chain (the chain I bought in the store was "third-party").

Eventually, the toilet would be fixed, and I would receive the warranty for the work (telling me that it could break again at any time and that I had absolutely no rights for a refund) and licensing of the toilet (only one person at a time, and I was not allowed to transfer the chain to another toilet).

As much as I would hate having a Microsoft toilet, I would prefer it to an Apple toilet. In that case, after finding a broken chain, I would not be able to go to my regular hardware store; instead, I would be directed to an Apple hardware store or a recognized Apple distributor. Then, they would find out my 30-year-old house did not have an Apple-coordinated bathroom, and I would have to replace every component of it to fix the chain. Finally, if I had any problems using the toilet, I would be told that I "was holding it wrong." Luckily, I have a "Free and Open Source" toilet, so I can fix just the part that is broken and utilize the rest of my parts however I desire. ∎