BUSINESS MODELS

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

Joe Casad, Editor in Chief

The bloggers have really been busy recently with commentary on the "It's Better with Windows" website, which is intended to convince EeePC users that they should be running Windows on their minis instead of Linux. I have already used this space to voice my opinion on the Asus EeePC matter. In summary, I will admit that Linux lost the battle when Asus switched its emphasis to Windows, but in the long term, the episode still marks a diminution of Microsoft's power, since they were forced to keep back-pedaling and changing their plans in the face of real competition. This month, my overriding reflection is one of alarm at how very serious everyone is about one extremely vacuous video. The "It's Better with Windows" video is actually one of the least informative informational videos I've ever seen. In fact, I couldn't find anything at all in the video that addresses the question of how or why the EeePC is better with Windows. A few vague headings like "Trusted," "Familiar," and "Compatible," appear above and below the video area, but it isn't like they are links to some kind of white paper – they just fade into the background as undifferentiated marketing hype.

The video itself has no spoken words. Music plays while the camera tells the story of a little family of models who live in a tastefully decorated house. They are not only rich but are also the embodiment of a sophisticated aesthetic sense, with color-coordinated pillows on their sofas and small sculptures placed at strategic points throughout their environment – including a white statue of an artichoke at the place where the model family gathers for breakfast. Despite their seemingly formidable financial resources, they all carry around matching $300 small computers.

Three child models take their $300 computers down to the seaside and frolic in the waves, posing for digital pictures. (This is all very reminiscent of the "Polaroid Swinger" ads of the 1960s, for those whose archives go back that far.) The daddy model is away on a business trip. The family uses a small computer to communicate with the daddy model, who is lonely but happy to have his own small computer so he can stay in contact. The kids do a very good job of not guilt-tripping the father, but aside from that detail, the moment is quite like the scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* when the guy calls home from the space station to wish his daughter a happy birthday. In an irrelevant plot twist, however, the father spills coffee on his white shirt, and he uses the miracle of the built-in camera to show the family the coffee stain, thus providing the

audience with a pang of whimsical empathy, for the white shirt no longer matches the white small computers or the white artichoke statue.

Why am I telling you this? I just want to express my dismay about how everyone is taking this cheesy video so seriously. Of course, the Asus/Microsoft episode was a bad deal, but whatever went down between these two companies happened behind closed doors. The video didn't cause it. The video is just Asus piggybacking on the same feel-good brand building Microsoft has been doing every day for the past ten years.

By casting their lot with Microsoft, Asus has lined itself up to serve a vast throng of users who like what Microsoft dishes out, but the reality is, they have also cut themselves off from another segment of the populous. I share the conviction that Linux is ready to compete with Windows for mainstream users, but the Linux niche belongs with mainstream users who are rational and premeditative in their purchasing decisions. At least for now, everybody should give up on making a play for the segment of the market that is inclined to say "If only I buy the right operating system, I'll get to be a model with a statue of an artichoke on my breakfast counter."

The only way to get that audience is to buy it – and who's going to outbid Redmond?

Joe