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Windows XP: Corporate Benefits

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A client inquiry

Question

We are seeing a lot of activity on Windows XP for the home — are there any corporate benefits to this product?

Answer

We agree **Microsoft's** messaging would have you believe Windows XP is a consumer product only and not appropriate for corporate use, and continue to find it strange that Microsoft has focused almost exclusively on the consumer benefits to this product. Given the typical long lead times involved in convincing a corporation to adopt any product, we would have expected Microsoft to have built a foundation of XP advantages for the corporate market some time ago. The fact that it still hasn't supports our belief that many corporate IT shops are of the mind this product is more appropriate for gamers and other home users rather than corporate use. Strangely enough, the professional version of the product is not only appropriate for corporate use, but improved enough over preceding versions of Windows to receive preferential treatment in most cases.

While there are improvements across the product in terms of easier setup, improved boot times and performance, improved security, migration capability and remote management features, the three aspects of this product that should make it compelling for IT buyers are:

1. It works better on current-generation hardware than any other Microsoft operating system.
2. It will remain under support until 2005. (Windows 2000 moves into a reduced support roll in 2003.)
3. It is a minor rather than a major revision over the previous version. (It is generally believed to be more prudent to deploy .X versions of products due to the historical high bug counts in first releases.)

Based on our own experience, we expect the cost benefit of this product over NT and 9x products to provide even more rapid cost recovery than Windows 2000 did. We won't know this for sure until the numbers come back from the early-deployment companies next year, but the migration utilities alone should account for a significant portion of that accelerated cost recovery.

Because of the significant amount of hardware change going on during the next 18 months, one feature of Windows XP may become critical to companies doing large or ongoing hardware deployments: Unlike previous versions of Windows, which generally required driver support from the hardware suppliers, as part of the installation process, Windows XP checks on the network for updated drivers. This process provides one more check to make sure the hardware and related drivers are correct and provides a much better software upgrade experience, and should have a positive impact on the imaging experience as well.

With regard to imaging, XP appears to handle massive changes in hardware much better than 2000 did; Windows 9x products aren't even in the same league. We have pulled hard drives out of one **AMD**-based

machine and in parallel put them in a new P4 machine, and with a couple of reboots (and the use of the Windows and Office XP disks for authentication) had the new machines up and running in a matter of minutes with full functionality. This suggests that a single image should cover a vastly wider array of hardware, simplifying both image management and support requirements.

We remain very impressed with this offering and can't explain why Microsoft has chosen not to market it more effectively to an IT audience that would likely find it very compelling.