

Origin: TH - 1318 - alt.folklore.computers
From: HANKELLIS Public
To: ALL
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Re: Dvoraks' Hall of Infamy

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I was cleaning out the closet and found a bunch of old PCMagazines. I came across this article and thought it to be too rich not to post. Do you remember some of the products mentioned?

PCMagazine
Vol. 8, No. 7
April 11, 1989

by John C. Dvorak

Dvorak's Hall of Infamy

In 20 years, very few of the computer companies that we know and love will still be with us. Many will have zigged when they should have zagged. Many will be bought out by Microsoft or Lotus (and soon thereafter disappear from the face of the earth), and many will go out of business for reasons unknown. Success in high technology is a phenomenon few can understand and fewer can predict. One way to examine the phenomenon is to look at the big losers and see what they had in common. So I decided to open Dvorak's Hall of Infamy. I've awarded prizes in three categories. Congratulations to the winners.

* The Order of the Tin Fireplug

To make it into the top tier of flops, a product had to be overhyped: declared a superproduct that would change the world. Those honored in this category are IBM's 'TopView', 'The Last One', 'Lightning' from Borland, 'Jazz', Gavilan Psrtable, IBM PC Convertable, PCjr, Apple Lisa, Convergent Workslate, Mindset computer, TI 99/4A, HP Touchscreen PC, Fortune computer, Intel 80186/80188 chips, Intel 432 chip, Zilog Z-8000 chip, National Semiconductor 32032 chip, 'Wordstar 2000', 'Ovation', DEC Rainbow, 'Vision', Tandy 2000, Tandy 600, 'DR Logo, UCSD Pascal, 'Valdocs'.

* The Order of the White Elephant

Next comes the second tier - products that were ill-timed and flawed, but somewhat interesting. They got publicity, but no sales. Worthy of the White Elephant are: Dot Computer, Cullinet's 'Goldengate' spreadsheet, 'Boeing CALC', 'Context MBA', 'Javelin', CP/M-88, 'R-base Clout', 'Jack3', Apple III, Intel 8085 chip, IBM Portable, IBM 9000, IBM 370/PC, 'Savvy PC', The Xerox PC, the MAD Computer, TI Professional, 'Microsoft Access', Albert Computer, 'EasyWriter', 'WordStar' for the PCjr, Commodore PC.

* The Order of the Dodo Bird

The bottom tier includes the weird and memorable addball flops, products in a category by themselves. These include 'It' from Martin-Marietta, Dysan/Tabor 3~-inch disk, Amdek 3-inch disk, Apple Twiggy 5~-inch disk,

Hercules InColor card, IBM's PC Cluster network, JRT Pascal, NEC V-20, Zilog's Z-800 chip, CP/M 68K, DRI Personal BASIC, IBM RT PC.

I hope I haven't left out any of your favorites. Next year, of course, we'll add to this Hall of Infamy. Meanwhile, we have to look at this list (and it's a good one!) to see if we can find some common threads that determine the fate of these products.

SEVEN SUREFIRE WAYS TO FAIL:

1. Release an inferior product into a marketplace where a superior product is already established.
2. Ignore research and user preferences and build whatever -you- think people want.
3. Use drugs and base your decisions on drug-induced logic.
4. Design a product that you can't actually build.
5. Design a product, spend all your money promoting it, and then ship it years later.
6. Produce a product that neither you nor your marketing people can explain to anyone.
7. Give an otherwise decent product a really dumb name.

There's actually an eighth rule:

8. Don't let anyone know about or see the product, especially the press.

Unfortunately, the products in this latter category are the unknown flops - they make up the fourth tier. I'm sure they know who they know who they are and have special secret award ceremonies.

I'd like to personally congratulate there charter members on their making it into the Hall of Infamy.

Now what I have to do is find a good location around Canton, Ohio, or some other little known town looking to have a world-famous tourist trap, and we can start a new American institution.

In the meantime, I wish all the newcomers into this business lot of good luck. And remember: if you don't succeed, you've always got Dvorak's Hall of Infamy to fall back on.

Origin: TH - 0733 - COMEDY-L
From: DANIEL LO
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Date: 05/04/95 at 07:44
Re: SOFTWARE COMAPNIES

Public

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Software - How Software Companies Die
By: Orson Scott Card

The environment that nutures creative programmers kills management and marketing types - and vice versa. Programming is the Great Game. It consumes you, body and soul. When you're caught up in it, nothing else matters. When you emerge into daylight, you might well discover that you're a hundred pounds overweight, your underwear is older than the average first grader, and judging from the number of pizza boxes lying around, it must be spring already. But you don't care, because your program runs, and the code is fast and clever and tight. You won. You're aware that some people think you're a nerd. So what? They're not players. They've never jousted with Windows or gone hand to hand with DOS. To them C++ is a decent grade, almost a B - not a language. They barely exist. Like soldiers or artists, you don't care about the opinions of civilians. You're building something intricate and fine. They'll never understand it.

BEEKEEPING

Here's the secret that every successful software company is based on: You can domesticate programmers the way beekeepers tame bees. You can't exactly communicate with them, but you can get them to swarm in one place and when they're not looking, you can carry off the honey. You keep these bees from stinging by paying them money. More money than they know what to do with. But that's less than you might think. You see, all these programmers keep hearing their parents' voices in their heads saying "When are you going to join the real world?" All you have to pay them is enough money that they can answer (also in their heads) "Geez, Dad, I'm making more than you." On average, this is cheap. And you get them to stay in the hive by giving them other coders to swarm with. The only person whose praise matters is another programmer. Less-talented programmers will idolize them; evenly matched ones will challenge and goad one another; and if you want to get a good swarm, you make sure that you have at least one certified genius coder that they can all look up to, even if he glances at other people's code only long enough to sneer at it. He's a Player, thinks the junior programmer. He looked at my code. That is enough. If a software company provides such a hive, the coders will give up sleep, love, health, and clean laundry, while the company keeps the bulk of the money.

OUT OF CONTROL

Here's the problem that ends up killing company after company. All successful software companies had, as their dominant personality, a leader who nurtured programmers. But no company can keep such a leader forever. Either he cashes out, or he brings in management types who end

up driving him out, or he changes and becomes a management type himself. One way or another, marketers get control. But...control of what? Instead of finding assembly lines of productive workers, they quickly discover that their product is produced by utterly unpredictable, uncooperative, disobedient, and worst of all, unattractive people who resist all attempts at management. Put them on a time clock, dress them in suits, and they become sullen and start sabotaging the product. Worst of all, you can sense that they are making fun of you with every word they say.

SMOKED OUT

The shock is greater for the coder, though. He suddenly finds that alien creatures control his life. Meetings, Schedules, Reports. And now someone demands that he PLAN all his programming and then stick to the plan, never improving, never tweaking, and never, never touching some other team's code. The lousy young programmer who once worshiped him is now his tyrannical boss, a position he got because he played golf with some sphincter in a suit. The hive has been ruined. The best coders leave. And the marketers, comfortable now because they're surrounded by power neckties and they have things under control, are baffled that each new iteration of their software loses market share as the code bloats and the bugs proliferate. Got to get some better packaging. Yeah, that's it.

--} Randall {=- randall.woodman@lunatic.com

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