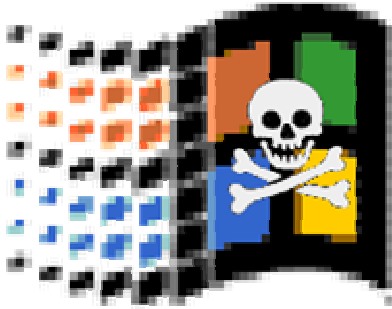


# Will Microsoft's Strong Anti-Piracy Stand Drive People to Linux?

by George Lunt



Microsoft is due to release its new Vista operating system either toward the end of this year or at the beginning of next year. Will this new operating system be as successful as Microsoft's other offerings?

Microsoft's own greed could end Windows reign as the leading desktop operating system. To fight piracy, Microsoft first introduced activation with its Windows XP. Activation was supposed to insure that one copy of XP can only be used on one PC. Hackers easily created versions of Windows that avoided activation. Then in the fall of 2004, Microsoft introduced "Windows Genuine Advantage". This program was created to allow Microsoft to check individual PCs to see if they are running a genuine XP or a pirated XP version. At first it was voluntary. Then last summer, Microsoft made it mandatory in order to download any free Microsoft software. Now its even become necessary to get XP security patches. If your PC fails the test and you have a counterfeit installation disk that appears genuine (including the holographic emblem similar to the one on real copies of Windows), Microsoft will send you a genuine disk for free in exchange for the fake disk. Otherwise, to make your Windows genuine you need to either buy a genuine Windows XP or take advantage of whatever offer Microsoft cares to give you.

With the advent of the "Windows Genuine Advantage" campaign, Microsoft has become a personification of a typical, greedy "Corporate Alien". As Linux distributions get better and better, Microsoft has to be careful how it deals with its users. They seem to think that their software is so good, that people would rather pay than switch.

Microsoft licensing always stipulated that, to be legal, you had to buy a license for the Windows or DOS operating system for every PC you own. But from the early DOS days up to Windows 2000, someone would buy one operating system and pass it around to family, friends, and neighbors. So that one *Windows 98 Second Edition* wound up on ten or more PCs.

Linux, on the other hand, allows you to legally install it on every computer you own. So putting Linux on ten or more PCs is not only legal but desirable as a form of advertising for the operating system. But Windows users have been doing the same thing all these years. They've been advertising Windows by passing it around. It wasn't legal, nor condoned by Microsoft, but Windows piracy was a form of advertising that actually helped promote Windows and insure its growth. As you can see, all this rampant piracy didn't prevent Microsoft's Chairman Bill Gates from becoming one of the richest men in the world.

There's another thing to consider, when you think of operating system piracy. If you're a corporation with thousands of computers, you get a special deal on Windows licensing. If you're a big PC maker like Hewlett-Packard, you get a discount on OEM versions of Windows. But if you're a small computer store and you build five clone PCs per month, you'd have to pay the typical single user price for genuine Windows. (For XP that's about one hundred dollars for the Home Edition and one hundred fifty dollars for the Professional Edition.) It's hard for a small individual to get started and compete with the big boys, and pirating the operating system can be a means of leveling the playing field. Such piracy can be considered as really being a "discount for the Working Class".

There are several Linux distributions that are just as good or even better than anything Microsoft has to offer. But people will still cling to Windows because they don't really want to learn anything new and switching to Linux would require a small learning curve. Microsoft has probably already made deals with PC vendors to install its Vista on practically every major PC brand in the US as soon as it comes out. To be fair to everyone, all PC's should come without an operating system. When someone orders the PC they would order the operating system as well and the store would then install it. Imagine if people were given the choice: "Fedora Core 4 Linux: free" or "Windows Vista Professional: \$200.00". I wonder if they would still choose Windows?

Microsoft could actually make Windows the operating system for the next hundred years. All they have to do is make Vista free when it comes out. Just like Linux, the free version would have no support or warranty. They don't even have to make it open source (reveal its internal code); just make it free. They could still make money by creating a highly secure, highly tweaked, fully supported corporate version of Vista and sell it to big companies that can afford it. This is what Linux companies like Redhat and Novell do. If Vista was free, pirates would stop making money, Microsoft would save millions by eliminating the "Orwellian" tracking needed to determine if Windows is genuine, and Linux would no longer be much of a threat. Unfortunately corporate aliens tend not to see any further than the dollar sign.

Microsoft will probably stick to the "Windows Genuine Advantage" program and try to thwart all attempts at hacking. Even though hackers will be able to circumvent any code that Microsoft comes up with, they will eventually get annoyed playing games with the giant Corporate Alien. Then pirated copies of Vista will become hard to get. This will end the advertising benefits derived from unchecked piracy that Microsoft enjoyed in years past. Windows Vista will start to lose market share and in 10 years a major Linux distribution will be the leading desktop operating system. If Linux triumphs, Microsoft Office, will also be replaced by Open Office, and the Microsoft stranglehold on PC software will finally be broken.

If you like Microsoft and want to keep it in power, encourage it to freely give away its Vista operating system. At least, suggest that they drop the annoying "Windows Genuine Advantage" program.

If you want to hasten Microsoft's downfall. Don't hack, pirate or buy Windows, especially its new incarnation, Vista. Learn how to work with your favorite distribution of Linux. You can download Linux distributions for free. Even with broadband this can take a long time. You can buy any Linux distributions for almost the cost it takes to make the disks at [osdisc.com](http://osdisc.com). When you buy your next computer make sure genuine Linux is loaded as your operating system. The more Linux gets established, the more everyone will be creating bigger and better software for it. In no time at all you will be getting the "Linux Genuine Advantage".

**George Lunt** is someone who feels the world is getting too corporate. His writings relate the individual's struggle with big government and big corporations. His website is <http://www.corporate-aliens.com>.

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