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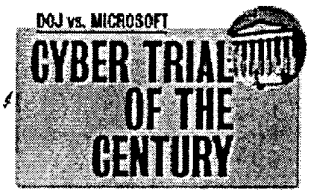
How tightly linked are Windows, IE?

Not very, as Sm@rt Reseller's tests of the '98Lite' shell-replacement product demonstrate: Win98 still 'looks like a duck.'

By *Steven J. Vaughan-Nichols*, Sm@rt Reseller
January 28, 1999 11:54 AM PT

Microsoft Corp. may continue to attest that Web browsing cannot be removed from Windows 98, but there's evidence to the contrary.



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And the evidence doesn't hinge on data included in a spreadsheet listing of dynamic link libraries (DLLs), access to which the judge in the Department of Justice vs. Microsoft. antitrust trial provided to DOJ lawyers Thursday morning.

Instead, the proof is available to all on the Web.

Australian biologist Shane Brooks has decoupled Internet Explorer 4.0 from Windows 98 and, with his "98Lite" installation program, anyone else can do, too.

98Lite, which requires both Windows 95 and 98 installation disks, works by replacing the Windows 98 Explorer shell with the Windows 95 Explorer shell.

Specifically, 98Lite removes Internet Explorer 4.0, Active Desktop Components, Internet Connection Wizard and Windows Update functionality -- leaving a machine with an otherwise Windows 98 operating system.

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No 'parlor trick'
This isn't just a parlor trick.

For several weeks, Sm@rt Reseller has evaluated 98Lite and found it, for all practical purposes, to be a fully functional Windows 98 operating system.

In particular, such ordinary Windows applications as Microsoft Office 95 and 97, Netscape 4.0 and 4.5, Pegasus Mail 2.5 and Lotus Notes 4.0 all worked perfectly. When it comes to productivity, Windows 98 without Internet Explorer 4.0 works like a champ.

The vast majority of Win98's advantages are kept. Improved driver support, the FAT 32 file system and better memory management is all in place.

For almost all practical intents, 98Lite gives you all the advantages of Windows 98 without its disadvantages: slow performance and bulky hard disk footprint

Some base operating system functionality is lost. Active Desktop, Quick Toolbar and in-site editing of the Start Menu are unavailable. None of these, though, can be described as critical in any way to the operating system. They certainly weren't missed in the evaluation of 98Lite.

Indeed, 98Lite felt more responsive than native Windows 98. On one of the evaluation machines, an ancient Dell 466/ME running a 33/66MHz 486DX2 with 24MBS of RAM, 98Lite was actually be pleasurable to use. We wouldn't even have tried running Windows 98 on such a low-powered system.

Disputing Allchin
In testimony released this week, Microsoft Senior Vice President James Allchin refuted the findings of government witness Edward Felten, who claimed to have managed to remove IE from Windows 98 with little trouble.

Allchin says that Felten merely hid the Web browsing functionality and that the mechanism

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he used to do so ended up substantially degrading Windows 98's performance.

"Whether a piece of software or some functionality can be 'removed' from a software product does not mean it was not a useful, integrated part of the product in the first place," testified Allchin. "My hand can be surgically removed from my body, but it was certainly a well-integrated part of my body before that surgery"

But 98Lite doesn't do any major surgery to cut Internet Explorer 4.0 from Windows 98. Instead, all it does is edit the INF files so that certain Windows 95 files -- Explorer.exe, Shell32.dll, ComDlg32.dll, NotePad.exe and WordPad.exe -- are used in replace of their Windows 98 equivalents while not installing the Internet Explorer browser files.

Some files that are essential to Internet Explorer 4.0, notably shdocvw.dll and mshtml.dll, do stay in 98Lite due to their use by the 98 help system and Outlook Express.

The browser itself though, iexplore.exe, and other programs with browser-like behavior, such as Windows Update, are gone. Other browsers -- besides Netscape, Opera was evaluated -- work flawlessly.

Looks like a duck

Is this then, Windows 98 without Internet Explorer? We think so. If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck and acts like a duck, we think it's a duck.

Windows 98 without Internet Explorer 4 is a working operation system and Internet Explorer 4.0 is not an vital part of Windows 98.

See also: ZDNN's Business section

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