

Excerpt of an Essay  
Lewis Perdue: PS/2 Is For Suckers

(Editor's note) The author is the Editor-in-Chief of PC Management Letter, 1200 Mt. Diablo Blvd, #303, Walnut Creek CA 94596. This article was published in his Letter, excerpted by "Bay Area Computer Currents", 4-5-88 issue. The present version is again a digest of the excerpt. The purpose of presenting it here is not we are against PS/2. We like the author's noble philosophy toward technological development. It helps us further strengthen our faith and love of our own friendly, cheap, reliable old buddy A///. Thank you very much Lewis. (LKS)

The present article attempts to look behind the drooling adulation heaped on PS/2 and its OS/2, by market, media and industry observers, who fall in love with IBM's hype without assessing its effect on its users.

Even if there were no serious flaws with PS/2 and OS/2, the appropriate technology already exists, at much less price, to accomplish what 95% of PC, A/// users need.

The PS/2's merit is for centralized large corporate computing departments that need easy, fast ways to interface microcomputers with mainframes, while still leaving some computing power at the desktop level for personal use. Beyond that, PS/2 + OS/2 for the real world is a system very expensive, over-promoted, highly complicated, slow, confusing, and inflexible.

Even more important: PS/2 is a closed system. Much of the technology is built into its motherboard. If technology improves, its built-in features may well bar an upgrade to better technology. This represents a giant leap backward, and is an outrageous slap to the users. Buying into the PS/2 trap will put users at the mercy of a giant insensible bureaucracy.

"Micro-Channel" clones will inevitably appear. But the very high legal costs with IBM must be eventually paid by the users, by driving up the prices of the clone products. Although IBM's lawsuits are legal, it's monopolistic, anti-competitive strategy leads only to high prices and stagnant technology.

On the hardware side, prices for PS/2 and clones are likely to remain high for 3 reasons: 1: the MicroChannel architecture is more expensive to manufacture. Expansion cards are 15% to 30% more expensive to produce than those for PC or AT buses. 2: Lawsuits. 3: Relative lack of competition impedes incentive to lower prices.

On the software side, the OS/2 cannot be easily transported from PC to PC. Users need a different machine-specific version of OS/2 for each machine! OS/2 needs 1.5 mbytes of RAM and about 3 mbytes of hard disk space just to run. The cost for upgrading 8088-based PCs to be able to run OS/2 is estimated to be at least \$2-3K.

Applications software will be an even bigger financial burden: First: OS/2 requires a special version. All existing applications software must be thrown away. Second: Special OS/2 versions are more expensive than their DOS cousins. Third: New versions need retraining, that costs as much as 9 times the price of the software itself. Fourth: OS/2 is exponentially more complicated to manage than PC/MS/DOS. It requires much higher level of technical expertise, which, if a company does not have, must be sought from expensive consultants. Fifth: System crashes and down-time will grow more frequent with the complicated software. Sixth: Human beings are not multitasking animals. Nobody can do well any one of 3 or 4 tasks at the same time. The alleged advantage of concurrent applications of OS/2 is simply not true.

Even if PS/2 OS/2 were a cost effective system, it's still only a technical mediocrity:

1: OS/2 was written to run on the 80286 chip, not for the more powerful 80386. When we users of 8088 may leapfrog easily directly to 80386, (or directly to Motorola's 88000 RISC chips - LKS), why should we hobble with a less than optimum system? Unix may be a better bet.

2: OS/2 is slow. Unix is 700% faster. An AT using OS/2 bogs down slower than a PC!

3: PS/2 is slow. Models 50 and 60 with 10 MHz creep along no faster than an AT clone. Models 25 and 30 are just jury rigged XTs.

What PS/2 OS/2 offers is confusion, new hardware (\$), new operating systems (\$), more omplexity, more resources to administer and training, wasting time and money on IBM Pet Rocks. We A/// users alwways remember: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

(I believe PS/2 OS/2 will be a swiftly passing issue in the computer industry. Its total life span from birth to death could be only about 10 years. In fact it will not literally take off before it lands, either crashed or gracefully. The new Reduced Instruction Set Computer (RISC) with its 88000 or SPARC chips will mature sooner than later. All those who buy and use the PS/2 OS/2 systems now will simply help IBM pay its own mistakes, much worse than what we A///, Lisa and AII users were obliged to pay Apple's mistakes -LKS).

We the users should put on blinders and avoid the hype, glitz and hard sell of technology for its own sake, and focus instead on only enough technology to solve our own problems. For most of us, a good old A/// at \$400 or less is enough. A few who use graphics may need some additional systems. With upgrade paths ranging from expansion boards to motherboard transplants, a shift to OS/2 or any other fancy gimmicks should be pushed to a far distant future. (LKS)