

How to Make OS/2 2.0 A Success

By Douglas A. Hamilton

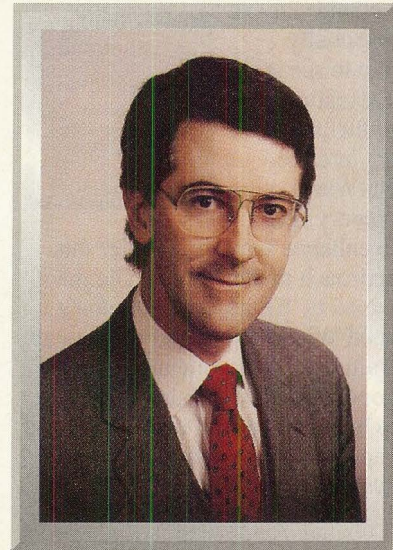
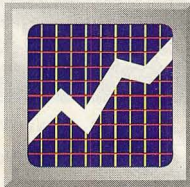
On January 28th, *The Wall Street Journal* declared that even Microsoft had given up on OS/2. For about three weeks, you could not even give away an OS/2 product. For me, the low point hit when my wife began to argue it was time for me to get a "real" job instead of wasting any more time on something that was obviously dead. (I didn't, but with a dwindling bank account and two kids to feed, I understood her feelings very well.)

Curiously, as devastating as it was at the time, that very article seems to have resurrected OS/2. I suspect that a lot of folks in Armonk and Boca Raton got up that morning, read the paper, and got scared right out of their skins. For the first time, the message got through that if they expected OS/2 to make it, they could not simply wait around for Microsoft to do all the heavy lifting.

I now find myself more bullish on the future of OS/2 than I have been at any point in the last 18 months. IBM made a great start when they offered a \$99 update to OS/2 to anyone who could spell "DOS." They recognized that OS/2 would never succeed unless some of those 50 million DOS users could be converted. With a \$40 million war chest for promotion and claims that 2.0 will be a "better DOS than DOS and a better Windows than Windows," IBM now seems determined to make OS/2 a success even over Microsoft's dead body, if that's what it takes. It's about time and that may be what it takes.

Intentions and money are not enough however. IBM may be a "market-driven" company, but sometimes you have to wonder what market they're driving to and whether it's the same one the rest of us inhabit. To make OS/2 a success, IBM is going to have to do more than talk cryptically about how "OS/2 can do" and take steps the rest of us can understand and relate to.

OS/2 has got to be dramatically more available and appealing for end-users. It's got to be supported on clones. We can't keep



hearing how the "real" OS/2 is just around the corner.

The situation faced by developers has to be remedied. Costs were outrageous even before that absurd \$2,600 price tag was placed on the OS/2 2.0 SDK. The market is miniscule and impossible to target. If you run an ad, 99% of all those who see it will have no possible use for your product, no matter how interesting it might seem, because they don't have OS/2. (But that won't stop them from requesting literature and running up your postage and printing bills.)

IBM is going to have to address these problems. Here's what they should do:

1. Make it easy to get! When OS/2 1.3 was announced, IBM waffled for a month over whether you needed the cover page from your old version or a dealer signature or a four leaf clover. Get 2.0 into the retail channel for the updates the way Microsoft did for Windows 3.0 and be sure there are lots of copies available on day one.

2. Be sure the product itself is right: Windows 3.0 applications have to run. The display has to be attractive. It sounds silly, but OS/2 has got to come with Solitaire and a word processor and a paint program and some pretty bitmaps for the desktop all bundled in. The control panel has to be as good and as easy to use as the one on Windows.

3. Certify and support OS/2 on non-IBM hardware. That disastrous marketing decision to imply a linkage between OS/2 and the PS/2 is still killing us. Over and over, I hear of companies who might consider moving to OS/2 except that with the mix of clones in their of-

fices, they just can't take the risk that it's not going to work. The fact that OS/2 is completely reliable on almost any clone has been a secret for far too long.

4. Pretend there will never ever be a version of OS/2 that could possibly be better than 2.0 because 2.0 is so good there's just nothing else left to be done. When you tell people about a future version, you just give them an excuse not to buy the current one. Keep your mouth shut about OS/2 2.1 or 3.0 or NT or whatever else you have "almost ready."

5. Print up and distribute a new OS/2 applications catalog from scratch in four colors with screen shots. Put a stack of them in every Egghead and ComputerLand in the country. No one I know actually believes all that stuff in the current Applications Guide is more than vaporware.

6. Develop an ad campaign that educates people in more tangible ways how they might use OS/2. For example, show how you might just keep opening up new windows with every new interruption. Dump the vacuous nonsense about how "OS/2 can do." I've been using OS/2 for three years and I still have no idea what that meant.

7. Put together a complete soup-to-nuts \$500 32-bit toolkit for developers and push to get it available through the mail-order discount houses. Grandfather all the OS/2 developers who bought the original Microsoft OS/2 SDK and offer a cheap upgrade path to the IBM toolkits.

8. Put on some serious, lavish trade shows devoted to OS/2 and give away the booth space to the small vendors. Stop the nonsense of figuring everything's got to be another PageMaker. If the product has sold more than a couple hundred copies on OS/2, accept the judgment of the market and admit it's probably interesting. Also, make your mailing lists available to developers on a consistent basis. (Right now, they can be gotten but only if you know the right people.)



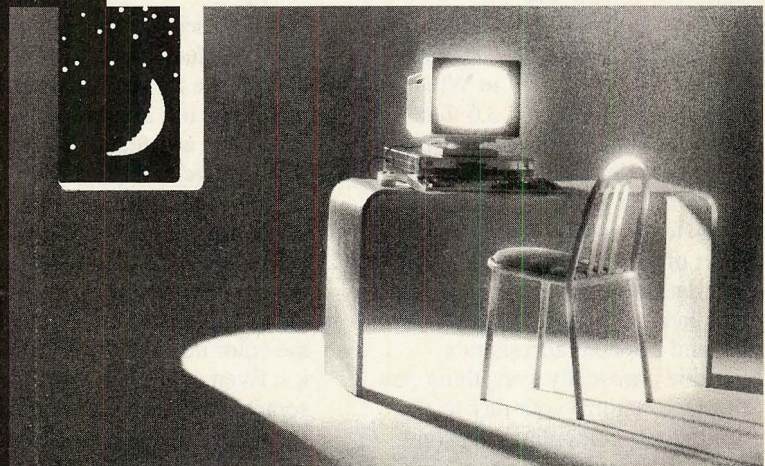
and giving free toolkits to everyone in the Developers Assistance Program, are already being considered.

My sources tell me some of these steps, and others, including bundling OS/2 free with PS/2s

Success may be around the corner. Let us hope so. ■

Douglas A. Hamilton is the founder and president of Hamilton Laboratories in Wayland, Massachusetts and the author of Hamilton C shell, an advanced interactive command processor and tools package for OS/2.

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