I was glad to have a conversation with you and Brad before I wrote my Win98 column, and I'm glad to have your views on how it came out. As you know, from the very first time we met back in 1991, I have invited you to let me know what you like and dislike about what I write, and have extended the same invitation to others in the industry. I believe we in the media sometimes are too closed off from outside views, and I feel a responsibility to open myself to them, especially because the Journal is a very influential platform. As a columnist, I have great license to express opinions. Our exchanges did in fact have an impact on what I finally wrote.

On your conflict with the government, I appreciate your sharing your views on it. As I've explained, I'm not up on all the details of the situation because it hasn't been my responsibility to cover it.

But I would observe, just as a personal view, that there's a distinction between your retaining full ability to integrate innovative features into Windows - like the browser or, eventually, speech recognition - and the wall of formal and informal business arrangements you typically have built around Windows to restrict how OEMs can present it to users. It seems to me there'd be nothing wrong with agreeing to let Compaq do its own shell or opening screen, just like they once did in the Win 3.1 days, even though
they did it badly. I might criticize these screens if they were too
marketing-oriented, just as I have criticized your own desktop channel bar
for plastering ads on the user's desktop. But in principle, I see nothing
wrong with it. Hell, somebody might even hit upon a simpler or better
metaphor using HTML for a shell, just like HP and then Compaq did a good
thing for users by adding a hard-wired keyboard "Internet button," which
launches a browser and dialer.

I also really do think users benefit from choice, so a pre-load of Navigator
would be fine, assuming Netscape can cut the deals. This is no different
from the common bundling of AOL, MSN and CompuServe on new machines, or from
some OEM packages which include both Quicken and Money.

I think IE, in both standalone form and in the form of the ActiveX control,
should be able to stand on its own quite well in the competition with
Navigator, even if both were available on some new PCs. And I think Outlook
Express is more than a match for Netscape Mail, or Eudora, as a POP3/IMAP4
client.

These are just my random thoughts, and I have no idea whether they are
relevant to your current talks. I hope you can gain a settlement,

Walt Mossberg

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Walt Mossberg
Personal Technology Columnist
The Wall Street Journal

---Original Message---
To: Bill Gates <bog@MICROSOFT.com>
To: Walt Mossberg <wmossberg@wsj.com>
Date: Thursday, May 14, 1998 7:29 PM
Subject: RE: Windows98

> Thanks for engaging with us on a discussion of Windows98 before your column
> came out. Brad and I were discussing just now that although we feel the
> operation is not really as positive as we might have hoped for you, followed
> your admirable approach of calling it exactly like you see it, Windows98's
> biggest impact will be problems that don't occur for the millions of people
> who get it on new machines or choose to upgrade but you are right that it is,
> not a vital upgrade. The peripheral makers and retail channel are enthused
> about the product. I hope the "Update" feature can change how we distribute
> fixes and driver improvements. As always you were thoughtful and fair in
> your analysis even if we don't see it exactly the same way.
>
> Our biggest problem with the government is their principle that we adding
> new features like the browser is a bad thing. So far they just aren't
> showing any willingness to accept the fact that the browser is not there
> just because it makes Netscape's life hard. This is the principle we can't
> give in on and they still haven't budged on it. It seems a crime to have a
> lawsuit because of this when the law and the consumer benefits are so
clear.
> The use the word "consumer choice" to talk about letting OEMs hide the
> browser from the user. We got started down this path because they decided
> that most features of the OS could be separated out like the device
> drivers.
> Wordpad, the file viewers, the network stacks and that maybe we shouldn't
> be
> able to package them into a single product. We always told them the browser
> was a bad place to start because the deletion breaks things but they were
> confused on that point. They thought the remove function actually deleted
> the browser which of course it didn not - only the invoke and some tiny ICW
> files. When the browser goes so do the browser APIs.
>
> Having all the government resources against a company like this is
> mind-blowing. I hope I get a chance to get back to software before I see you
> next.

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