“The Single-Platform Lie:

How an IS Manager Can Put Your Job and Your Company At Risk”

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Information is the lifeblood of every corporation.

Computer information quantifies sales, expenses, expenditures, research and development costs, salaries, withholdings, commissions, investments and much more. Sales personnel keep contact and account lists on personal computers. CAD/CAM files delineate how companies create and design the products and goods they sell.

Without the back end data to substantiate its claims, your company is in trouble during an IRS audit, a government Comprehensive Organizational Review (COR), or a class-action lawsuit. There are myriad agencies, lawyers and methods which can come into play to put your company out of business, put it up on the auction block, and put you in the unemployment line.

Information is clearly a valued corporate asset.

In order to protect and manage its computer information, companies create data security and information security departments. These departments may put rules in force on systems managers governing everything from whether or not floppy drives are allowed on certain PCs, to specifying the frequency of backups and anti-virus scans on each file server.

They establish penalties and procedures governing the misuse and theft of computer systems and corporate information. They press for tough laws against hackers. These penalties and procedures get written up in employee manuals: Companies are often deadly serious about enforcing information security.

Yet, the most common threat to the life blood of a company and a company’s very existence comes not from a virus, nor from an external threat like a hacker, or from a disgruntled employee. It comes through the recommendations of the company’s own IS Management.

The Single-Platform Wintel Argument:

The idea of putting an entire corporation on a single desktop computer merely take the concept of creating lists of "standard" or acceptable hardware and software products to an illogical extreme.

It is a relatively simple form of information resource management and it allows the data processing or MIS department to do less work for its users.

IS managers who support the concept are quick to point out the potential benefits from this type of strategy:

- reduction of the number of purchase orders for procurement, maintenance and support
- quicker adoption of systems and software
- reduction in the complexity of computing
- ease of support
- more standardization
- ease of training
- fewer types of systems for MIS to develop software
- lower cost of clone PC systems versus name brands like Macintosh

The list goes on.

Locating The Single-Platform Wintel Lie:

The hard and true fact about platform selection is that MIS managers who support the Single-Platform Wintel argument do so, not because they objectively feel that they are doing what is best for their company and users -- but because they simply happen to personally prefer using and supporting Wintel systems. This is not in the best interests of the corporation which employs them.

The above reasons for standardization are merely after-the-fact rationalizations for their actions and opinions. These after-the-fact rationalizations and lame, weak evidence that do not stand up under close analysis.

Single-Platform Wintel is merely an updated 1990s version of the old data processing adages of “nobody ever got fired for choosing IBM...” or “program it using Cobol”. It has nothing to do with the economics or objective measurement

of what users, customers and companies want, need or should have -- or even what system or configuration is really best for a given task.

The problem in the 1990s is that technology has changed, users have become more sophisticated. Computers are no longer complex tools that are only usable by techno-dweebs. Choices as to what platform is most appropriate are complicated, and not as simple, safe and clear-cut as "IBM and Cobol". Almost any computer will do a given task for you, but the cost effectiveness of how it performs this task, user preferences and the appropriateness of a platform for a particular use are much more complicated to measure. "Feelings" as to what is best are a bogus way of running a multi-billion dollar business.

How do you locate the lie?

The test for the single platform lie is simple:

Any MIS manager who supports single-platform Wintel should be brought before his management and forced to bring out all of his departmental and user task-time studies and requirements analysis documentation to "prove" that he had an objective reason for choosing Wintel, prove that it was exactly what his users and customers wanted, needed and requested, and prove that there were cost savings in support, acquisition, training, and life-cycle cost of ownership.

As there is ample evidence in quality publications by independent sources to challenge such an assumption, the lie becomes obvious.

The Impact of Believing the Lie:

Make no mistake, taking the path of Single-Platform Wintel has a quantifiable and detrimental impact on both you and your company, and it can put both information professionals and other employees on the unemployment line.

Ironically, its the very same information professionals who get laid off, who were the strongest proponents of Single-Platform Wintel.

Outsourcing: The Biggest Cost

Moving to a harshly-enforced single Wintel standard makes it child's play for an automation company to go to your CEO and propose a complete outsourcing of all Information Systems.

To put it bluntly, if your company is on a strict Single-Platform Wintel standard, it is a lot easier to replace the entire IS management and staff. The outsourcer has fewer types of talent to recruit and does not have to spend lots of money locating diverse expertise.

If your company has a mixed environment of PCs, Macintosh, UNIX, etc. and has adopted the corporate philosophy that "every tool is good, every system will be supported, users should get what they want and need, " it will be much, much harder for an outsourcer to cover the diversity of the systems and find cheaper, better personnel to replace all of the information professionals in MIS.

This is why consulting houses, contract expertise and outsourcing agencies frequently recommend single-platform Wintel as a first step for a company. They want to make it easier for a takeover.

An environment that openly embraces a mix of different systems and technologies, each objectively and appropriately implemented according to carefully analyzed departmental and user needs, presents a much tougher proposition for the outsourcer. Any outsourcing agency will have to:

1. Scoop up existing personnel into the outsourcing deal to gain support expertise (making the proposition that it will be cheaper a lot less likely)

2. Locate, sign up and prove that it has more experienced staff to support all the environments.

3. Convince executive management that a single-platform will result in cheaper, better operations so that it can set up an easier proposition for outsourcing.

Single-Platform Wintel is the fast and easy road to Outsourcing.

Times are tough. Everybody is looking to save money. Every company is looking for that competitive edge or "lean and mean" operations. When an MIS director is constantly whining to his or her management that "I don't have enough people to do the job", it adds fuel to the the outsourcing argument.

The outsourcing agency has access to the highest executive management and the board of directors -- people that a lowly MIS manager or director seldom even meets, knows or sees.

Without "face time", the MIS director is at a severe disadvantage. An outsourcer will typically point to high costs ("we can lower that!"), gross user dissatisfaction ("these departments can't get along with MIS"), downtime ("your present staff is not technically competent to support what you have!") and development backlogs

("these database systems are not done yet!").

When the MIS manager complains about not having enough people, the outsourcer will be quick to say: "see, even your own MIS director admits that this is all true".

The deck has been stacked against the MIS, and anyone who does not get along with the MIS department is apt to help plunge a knife into their Corporate Caesar along with Brutus The Outsourcer -- and it will be very easy for Brutus to find willing fellow assassins if MIS is not getting along with its users.

If your company is already on a harshly enforced single-platform Wintel standard, the MIS manager has very few cards to play against outsourcing:

(1) The MIS manager will have to prove that services really can be done cheaper in-house as opposed to being outsourced.

This is an extremely weak argument, because almost any outsourcer will have the hard figures to prove that they can save money and reduce downtime. Besides, if it can be done cheaper, why the hell wasn't the MIS manager doing this in the first place?

(2) The MIS manager has to prove that the quality of service is better in-house as opposed to using outsourced, or the irreplaceable special knowledge or expertise exists in the in-house staff, creating large scale disruption during the transition.

Since outsourcing will generally not have been done before, there will be absolutely no data to back up the opinion that service will be better. The MIS director will be totally open to the mercy of the Outsourcer's data -- and the Outsourcer will be armed with plenty of suspiciously glorious documentation and testimonials of millions saved for their past customers, along with lots of testimonials and documented complaints from the MIS department's own disgruntled users.

This will "prove" that quality sucks and that an outsourcer can do it better and cheaper.

The irreplaceable expertise argument is also weak, as the outsourcer can simply propose to hire away any irreplaceable MIS staff, wiping out this argument, and any "disruption of service" arguments will die right there and will be backed up by the outsourcer's references.

Bottom Line:

- MIS professionals will start hitting the unemployment line as they are replaced by outsourced personnel who may

or may not be technically more adept -- but they probably will be cheaper.

- Your corporate lifeblood is now in the hands of outsiders who have no fiduciary accountability to your company . Even if they make everything worse, they will still get paid and it will take a major act from your Board of Directors to remove them.

- The Outsourcer will maintain its position of control by keeping face time with executive management and "proving" their positive cost savings and quality improvement -- regardless of whether or not these are real or fictitious.

- With no professional, in-house expertise to challenge them, it will be difficult to ever dislodge the outsourcer on the basis of incompetence, lack of quality, downtime, or anything else. Only accumulated complaints from corporate users will ever raise an eyebrow from executive management -- and these will take time.

A truly adept outsourcer will leverage their relationship with a CEO or Board of Directors to squash user complaints and make it appear as if the corporate user is "not being a team player".

The smartest move that an MIS director can make is to protect his or her job security is to adopt an information technology attitude that openly accepts and welcomes systems other than Wintel.

To the MIS professional, the best advice is this:

Regardless of how you personally feel about Macintosh, UNIX, etc. there are users who simply prefer these operating systems and there are applications which run under these operating systems which will meet your user's needs and keep them happy. Happy users squelch outsourcing moves, because if "it ain't broke", executive management will be reluctant to risk messing with a winning formula.

Every platform is appropriate for something. No platform is best for everything.

Embrace the Macintosh. Embrace UNIX. Embrace it all.

Many arguments between MIS and users stem from a simple difference in computer preference. Eliminate this as an issue, and you reduce the sources for conflict between departments -- and you just may have some allies when the outsourcer

comes poking around.

An outsourcer gains no foothold in an environment where departments are satisfied with their information services.

MIS departments need to learn to get along with their users. If their users generate lots of support calls, train them and build sophisticated users, or consider moving them from Windows to a system like the Macintosh which has been proven to have a lower cost of support, greater ease of use and better user satisfaction.

Standardization introduces some order into chaos, but it is a proverbial double-edged sword. Strict adherence to a standard introduces mediocrity into the computing environment. Since there is no such thing as a single best system which will do everything for a user and always do it the best way, strict adherence to a standard means that complete success and satisfaction is impossible.

More than anything the emergence of the inexpensive desktop computer has made users and management much more aware of what they should be getting out of their MIS departments. Since expectations are getting higher, information professionals need to start measuring up to expectations.

If they wish to retain their jobs, information professionals need to remember that MIS and Data Processing are corporate services. They are 100% overhead, they can be outsourced at any time, and they had better not try to make Godlike power-plays that set arbitrary and unreasonable standards.

Arbitrarily standardizing upon Wintel is as stupid as having a carpenter who standardizes on a claw hammer. A claw hammer makes a lousy saw, just as a pair of pliers makes a lousy hammer.

Everyone has critics. A wise MIS director takes criticism seriously, not personally. They take it seriously by developing policies and procedures which insure that its users feedback is as closely listened to as its preferences, requirements and needs.

The policies and procedures are as simple and familiar as requirements analysis, talking to your users, user quality reviews, monitoring and measurement of downtime, uptime, customer satisfaction.

Other Costs

Aside from the loftier battles of outsourcing, the Single-Platform Wintel attitude imposes some very significant other costs on your corporation's bottom line.

The most potentially disastrous is its effect on life cycle costs.

Is a Wintel System Really Cheaper?

One of the big rationalizations for Single-Platform Wintel is that acquisition costs are lower for a PC than a Macintosh or UNIX system.

Advocates of single-platform Wintel are quick to scoop up a copy of Computer Shopper or some other magazine and point to the relative cheapness of clone PCs.

The problem with this argument is two-fold:

1. **It is completely unfair to compare a brand name Apple Macintosh with a no-name clone PC the way it is normally done**.

Yes, the no name PC is apt to be cheaper, but brand name, first tier computer systems from IBM and Compaq are always more expensive than a no-name clone, too.

The computer industry considers three vendors to be "first tier" brand names: IBM, Apple and Compaq. It is unfair to ever compare any of these with a no-name clone. They are brand name systems. When it comes to Macintosh, the comparison is really unfair.

Look at the capabilities in a Macintosh. There is generally more included right in the box. Macintosh systems use faster, more expensive SCSI hard drives. PCs predominantly use cheaper IDE drives. Want a fairer comparison? Try repricing that name brand PC with SCSI drives.

SCSI on a Macintosh is also very elegant and plug-and-play. Plug-and-Play was basically invented by Apple Computer. They have over a decade more experience at it than anyone else in the industry.

Obviously we are not close enough in capabilities -- try adding something like Corel SCSI on to the configuration to make the PC SCSI closer to what is implemented on a Macintosh.

Sound In and Sound Out has been standard on the Macintosh basically since 1984. Add on a name brand top of the line Sound Blaster board from Creative Labs to that PC. Now you are a little more comparable. Better make sure that the text-to-speech options are also there and that you can also use the Voice Blaster software for voice recognition. These capabilities are standard on a Macintosh.

LocalTalk networking and ethernet have both been standard on the Macintosh since 1991. Add on an ODI compliant 32-bit Ethernet adapter and a slower speed networking card like Farallon's old Phone Net PC card. Now the networking for

the PC is closer to being on par with what has been on the Macintosh for over five years. Better also buy a copy of Personal Netware or use Windows for Workgroups, Windows 95 or Windows NT instead of old Windows 3.11 for that PC to emulate the Macintosh's standard peer-to-peer file sharing.

As much as AppleTalk and Macintosh networking get bashed by the press, Macintoshes have never had any issues running simultaneous multiple networking protocols out of one networking port.

Print Sharing? Darn we forgot that! Better go buy Cooperative Printing Solutions' (COPS) COPSTalk or Miramar Systems' Mac LAN Connect to provide better file and print sharing into the operating system.

The new Power Macintosh systems have video-in and video-out. Plug in a camera or VCR and you can digitize video. Add on a top of the line Targa card to add in video in and video out capabilities to your Intel PC. Now we are getting closer in comparison.

Macintoshes can boot to any SCSI drive in the chain, including CD-ROMs. Gee, we still cannot do that with Windows 95 or Windows NT. Well, we can "almost sort of" simulate that by adding in a really big internal SCSI drive, partitioning it into multiple boot volumes to simulate multiple drives in the SCSI chain and buying a utility like System Commander to control booting.

Not quite the same, because all of the partition volumes are not necessarily going to be visible or usable -- but its vaguely similar.

Macintoshes were developed from the ground up to support PostScript and to have professional grade network color management through ColorSync 2.1. Better upgrade the consumer grade Kodak color management software in Windows to Kodak's top-of-the-line, add on PostScript printer support and replace all of my PCL printers, and now we're getting closer to a standard Macintosh configuration.

Macintoshes have included PC Exchange since System 7.1. They can read and write to any DOS-Windows formatted volume, and support removable media. Better add on Insignia Solutions' Mac Disk to the PC to roughly try to emulate this. Gee, the floppy drive in a Macintosh has a neat power-eject system, as opposed to a manual eject in a PC. No way to get this on a PC, so we'll add on two drives to sort of make up the difference.

The Macintosh OS is ROM and RAM based. It is not a Disk Operating System. Better add on more RAM on the PC and RAM DISK software to create a huge RAM Disk so that the whole OS loads into RAM. This will sort of be more like the Macintosh.

Memory management? No way to emulate this either. On a Macintosh it is a simple, flat memory addressing space. Any application can be of any size and located or loaded anywhere into RAM. PCs have to worry about how much of the first 640K is available, plus Expanded Memory (EMS) and Extended Memory (XMS).

Monitors? Unless you've got a Performa, Macintosh systems usually are bought with more expensive Sony Trinitron II monitors. Even the PC versions of this monitor are going to be pricey. Chuck that cheap EVGA shadow mask monitor on the PC and replace it with a top of the line brand name Sony Trinitron II. You have also been able to plug multiple monitors into a Macintosh long before Windows was even in existence.

If I have a PC Compatibility card from Apple Computer, Reply Corporation or Orange Micro in my Macintosh -- or a copy of Insignia Solutions' Soft Windows -- I can also run Windows and DOS software on my system. This means that a Macintosh can potentially run more software than the Intel PC can. Can the Intel PC run Macintosh software? No, so I guess we'll have to ignore this issue or buy a low-end Mac with the PC.

Now we've got a fair and more comparable configuration for a PC. Have we saved any money and is it still cheaper than a Macintosh?

Probably not. Even if it is, it is not apt to be cheaper to support. Macintosh machines will have a longer life span, better amortization curve, and higher re-sale on the back-end. When all of these factors are applied, PCs pale by comparison.

<u>The point here is that crude acquisition costs are an ineffective way of comparing systems</u>. It has complete merit in comparing a name brand IBM or Compaq Intel system to a clone PC -- but a PC-to-Macintosh comparison has no merit unless the capabilities are made more comparable.

Moreover, it is stupid to compare no-name clone PCs to brand name systems if your company does not purchase no-name clones. Most large corporations do not purchase no-name clones, they purchase first tier or second tier PCs -- IBM, Compaq, Dell, Gateway, AST, etc.

2. <u>Total Life-cycle Costs are a more valid and important measure of the cost of a system</u>.

If costs are an issue, why do MIS departments so overwhelmingly choose the most support-intensive and life cycle expensive desktop CPU to standardize upon?

Wintel is not a wise single-platform to choose .

Study after study from Ingram Labs, Evans Research, J.D. Powers and other industry leaders has shown that Macintoshes are:

- easier to support than Wintel systems
- cheaper to support than Wintel systems
- more plug and play than Wintel systems
- easier for users to learn than Wintel systems
- less frustrating than Wintel systems
- have greater user satisfaction than Wintel systems

Many software developers know this for a fact -- they charge a lot more for support for the Windows versions of their products than they charge for supporting Macintosh versions of their products.

Why? No telling what hardware and software is inside of a Wintel box, and Wintel systems tend to "break" more frequently and troubleshooting can be a bear because of subtle differences between hardware and firmware between systems.

Disney discovered this big time with its original release of The Lion King CD. The Macintosh version had no problems. The Windows version generated so many support calls that the product had to be recalled.

Want a more common example? Load an ISP's internet software on to your PC, odds are that it will at least overwrite and clobber a needed setting for some other Windows application loaded to the system -- generating probably a good hour of support calls. Do the same thing on a Macintosh, you are very unlikely to see any issue here. The flat memory addressing of the Macintosh promotes software plug and play -- no need to worry about how many TSRs are loaded, how much of the original 640K is free, how much EMS or XMS memory is set, etc.

Even the meantime between failure for just about any Macintosh component tends to be far superior to its "industry standard PC" counterparts or no-name clones.

When more can go wrong, support is always more expensive.

The entire thrust of both OS/2 and Microsoft Windows in all their versions and variants has been to legitimize and try to emulate the Macintosh interface, the Macintosh ease of use, and the Macintosh user experience. They are still not there yet.

An MIS manager who is really strapped for support staff and budget and hounded by users ought to be buying or leasing more desktop Macintoshes, not less of them.

It makes no sense when budgets are tight to exacerbate a support burden by putting more and more support-intensive Wintel systems out in your corporation. All this

does is chew up scarce overhead budgets.

What does make sense is to deploy more Macintosh systems and lighten the support burden and overhead costs.

No major corporation I have worked with who has moved to a Wintel standard has remained there for very long. They all go back to allowing Macintosh purchases.

Why? Because it was a stupid and costly move to go single-platform Wintel. Costly because it only served to double or triple support costs when secretaries start seeing vague and cryptic "General Protection Fault" errors, start running into any one of over 8,000 presently identified PC viruses, and start clobbering autoexec.bat and config.sys files when some new piece of software is loaded that conflicts with previously loaded software.

The smart companies I have worked with tend to prefer to use a Macintosh on the desktop to keep their support costs lower, and they can readily quantify how much they have saved by promoting Macintosh.

So far, we have only looked at readily quantifiable costs. We have not even begun to look at the issues of whether or not users like the PCs that MIS gives to them. An unused system is a waste of money. An overly frustrating system will not be used very often and as such is a waste of money. No company can afford to bleed money in today's economy.

A dissatisfied employee or an employee denied the tools they want and need to do their job wastes dozens of man hours per week. Collectively it costs a corporation untold millions and billions of dollars in lost productivity.

A user given a PC when he or she wanted and needed a Macintosh will waste valuable corporate time complaining and will generate more support calls than you can or want to handle. It is far more cost effective to give a user a desktop system with which he or she is most comfortable using and avoid the training and support headaches than to force the standardization issue.

An MIS manager who ignores this user or attempts to squash the complaints and force use of an arbitrary standard, generally gains an enemy who will willingly stab MIS in the back the moment it becomes vulnerable.

Single-Platform Wintel not only makes zero economic sense, it is politically dangerous.

Conclusions: Steps To Avoid The Disaster

1. **Adopt an IS Philosophy that Embraces a Mixed Environment**

Every platform and every OS has an appropriate use in your company. No OS and no platform does it all. No OS and no platform does it all in the single best way. Embrace them all.

There are no panaceas in computing! Single-Platform Wintel will only serve to set your company up for outsourcing of all information services.

2. **Implement platform appropriateness.**

Both developed and developing database and software systems should be regularly reviewed to determine if they are best placed on a mainframe, UNIX server, PC or Macintosh LAN file server, or standalone PC/Macintosh.

Every application should be run where it makes most objective sense to run it, from an economic and user access standpoint. The concept of Platform Appropriateness will leave no room for a consultant or outsourcer to criticize information systems in your company.

3. **Implement Information systems on Intranet Servers as much as possible.**

Intranet development is inherently cross-platform. Every platform and OS is a good client. Every platform and OS can potentially be used as a server. Every platform and OS is a good development station for an Intranet server.
There are a rich variety of tools already out there, and more appearing each day on Macintosh, Windows and UNIX.

4. **Implement Quality Control and Accountability for MIS**.

Data Processing is a corporate service. It exists to provide a service to the company, not to dictate policy to the company. It needs to be held accountable just like any other part of a corporation for its actions. It needs to have its actions reviewed by a council of its users. It needs to do objective requirements analysis -- not pro-forma requirements analysis.

MIS needs to have a less adversarial role with its users, and it needs to be held accountable because it controls the corporation's lifeblood.

The days are gone when MIS could play god or warlord over its corporate users. If information professionals want to avoid outsourcing and want to keep their jobs, they need to start measuring up to their users' expectations.

5. **Standards should be used as rough or basic guidelines, not hard and fast edicts.**

Single Platform Wintel is incredibly stupid. It cannot be justified from an economic standpoint, and it cannot be justified from any other standpoint. If you have to go single platform anything, it should be single platform Macintosh -- at least this platform has a proven track record for lowest life cycle costs, reliability, customer satisfaction, ease-of-use, ease-of-learning and lowest costs of support.

A Macintosh can also be augmented with compatibility solutions from Apple Computer, Reply Corporation, Orange Micro or Insignia Solutions to add on scalable price-performance DOS and Windows Compatibility. You cannot run Macintosh applications on Wintel.

With the upcoming PowerPC Platform systems, Macintosh is an even better and safer choice because the systems will be able to run Windows NT, Solaris, AIX and other operating systems.

If the acquisition costs of Macintosh appear higher, remember that there is more in the computer. If executive management still balks, consider the route of buying large external hard drives for each user and then doing an operating lease (no buy out or lease-to-own) on Macintosh systems. Macintosh systems lease very well, and the same amount of budget dollars will lease two to five systems where you might have been only able to buy just one. Leases can generally be written off against contracts or on taxes as a legitimate cost of doing business.

Leases also create predictable, manageable desktop budgets each year. MIS knows exactly how much it will cost, and how much it will cost to get out of the lease if something bad happens.

At the end of the lease, users can easily copy the contents of the internal drive to the external drive, saving the corporate data. Users will also be happier because leases can be built in with options to upgrade, so they will always have the newest technology.

Best of all, there are no obsolete systems sitting around years later gathering dust or (worse) generating lots of repair bills for equipment of no residual value to the company.

Still not good? Start looking at Macintosh clones!

6. **Consider doing software development on the Macintosh.**

Develop on a Macintosh, deploy everywhere. Major software developers all over

the world are doing this right now. Your company can, too.

The Macintosh has been a great cross-platform development solution for many years, and it has only been getting better and better.

Solutions like MetroWerks' Code Warrior will allow you to create C/C++ code which will run on Macintosh, Windows 95, Windows NT, Magic CAP, Be OS, 3DO, Java and much more. The development tools are surprisingly rich.

With one of the previously mentioned compatibility solutions or the upcoming PowerPC Platform, you can actually run the applications there as well.

If you are doing Internet or Intranet development, Macintoshes are great development stations and great, safe and secure servers.

7. **Sophisticated users are best when built, not bought.**

Instead of whining for more staff, fight for more training for your users. This will cut to the root of low-level support issues and save your existing staff to take care of the tougher problems.

Hire an employee who is proficient at using multiple platforms and applications, and you gain an asset. Make your worst users into sophisticated users by sponsoring training and you've gained ten-fold in reduced numbers of support calls, better job satisfaction and improved employee loyalty.

Quality training makes the worst MIS customers and the worst corporate liabilities into the greatest corporate assets.

8. **MIS staff should be required to be proficient at the systems that they are least comfortable supporting.**

Training and requiring a Windows bigot to properly use and support a Macintosh will frequently give this person a better appreciation for his customer's problem sets and a better appreciation for the platform.

Training and requiring Windows and Macintosh support personnel to deal with UNIX will probably make them both more grateful for what they normally do support, and more knowledgeable.

The best information professionals I have known are proficient at just about every type of hardware, operating system or software you throw at them. They have had to support all of them, and they know all of them well and can be very eloquent on the relative merits of each OS or platform.

They are “marketable” in the extreme. They generally love their users and customers. They do not overspecialize in Windows, Novell, Solaris, or anything else. They’ve done it all and want to know it all.

They are worth their weight in gold and platinum, and they are capable of writing their own paychecks each time that they apply for bigger and better jobs. Many of them could make more elsewhere, but they stay loyal to their companies because of the people, the attitude of their management and the environment that their companies provide.

All of them started out knowing nothing. Great support people are built, too.

Single-Platform Wintel simply is not a wise move for information professionals. It gets used as an excuse and promoted by contracting houses, large consulting houses and automation companies so that they can weasel out of contract deliverables and takeover all of your corporate information systems and add to their bottom line, not yours.

It has nothing to do with what is best for MIS, users, you or your corporation.

An information professional or an MIS director who promotes the single-platform argument cuts the throat of every fellow co-worker and deserves to get the very first pink slip when the outsourcer takes over.