



Where will you go today?



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Every choice we make implies that we disregard a number of other options. However, we must be aware of the unfortunate reality that, in most cases, these other options will largely disappear or become unreachable. Every choice we make is one step further in constraining our future choices. Do we still have choices?

CubicExplorer

A couple of weeks ago, we installed CubicExplorer on our PC. CubicExplorer (www.cubicreality.com) is a file manager/browser application that is an alternative for the traditional Windows Explorer environment.

In general, we like testing and exploring the capabilities of new software tools. However, until now, we paid little attention to alternative explorer tools. Most often, such alternatives provide lots of gadgets but very few real interface improvements.

However, since we had the pleasure experiencing the "improvements" in the new explorer version of Windows XP, time had come to evaluate some alternatives.

Success always is a little bit standing still

Anyway, our intention is not to discuss here alternative explorer products. This is only a starting point for some more essential thoughts.

First of all, while we have been working with Windows-based PC's for years, we only now fully realised how little progress had been made in the user interface since the early days. Of course, the new CubicExplorer product isn't the ultimate solution either. Still, it has some interesting features wherefore one could ask why on earth they hadn't been included in the standard product by Microsoft.

We think we all know the answer to this question. Once a product reaches a dominant market position, the need for innovation and change largely disappears. Ongoing product improvement delivers little added value to the company and only adds complexity, risk and cost.

In this world, the lack of product evolution is often a good indicator for the success of the product.

The price we pay for standardisation

Unfortunately, there is more. We also must be aware of the fact that the current Windows-platform is only one of the many paths that were available to us in the beginning.

Years ago, for various reasons, Windows has become a preferred choice platform and the preference of most organisations for standardisation and uniformity did the rest.

In those days, several paths were available that would lead us into the PC era. Very few of them are still available today. Even then, they are hard to reach.

In the real world, evolution is not an interconnected network that allows you to choose paths as you go. Evolution is a tree and you climb the branches.

This is the unfortunate reality of evolution. Every conscious or unconscious decision to go in either direction, by definition eliminates a number of choices. At the moment of your decision, all options are still open. Once on the road, it is very hard to change paths.

The ants society

None of this is new. Everyone who is or has been in the IT-business knows the love and hate relationship between end-users and the Windows-platform.

Only, this is not something that is specific to the IT-business. Similar observations can be made for all the other aspects of our life and for the society we live in.

We are living times of unprecedented globalisation and standardisation.

Same as for the IT-industry, this trend is supported by our own desire for more security, more stability and of course, more of everything for less. The net result will be an ongoing elimination of choice.

Unfortunately, people not always feel it that way. When talking about e-business, people will tell you how the Internet has put the customer in the driver's seat of the sales process. Buyers are now able to easily find information and alternatives, compare product features and prices, allowing them to make the optimal buying decision.

They are wrong. The people who believe this do not understand the real dangers of the Internet. Today, the Internet is gradually becoming a virtual environment that no longer gives you an accurate view on the real world. What the Internet will present you is a constructed perception of this reality that is increasingly controlled by sellers and other influencing parties.

This is the challenge we face. Today, all companies and businesses are asking for more creativity and innovation. In reality, this creativity and innovation only serves the process described above.


The very nature of companies as we know them today leaves no other choice. Companies themselves and the way they are organised are the real roadblocks on the road to innovation and creativity. Therefore, our quest for more innovation must start with rethinking the concept "company".


About the author



Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma. Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.

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