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Showstopper!: The Breakneck Race To Create Windows NT And The Next Generation At Microsoft



Synopsis

Showstopper is the dramatic, inside story of the creation of Windows NT, told by a Wall Street Journal reporter G. Pascal Zachary. Driven by the legendary David Cutler, a picked band of software engineers sacrifices almost everything in their lives to build a new, stable, operating system aimed at giving Microsoft a platform for growth through the next decade of development in the computing business. Comparable in many ways to the Pulitzer Prize-winning book The Soul of a New Machine by Tracy Kidder, Showstopper gets deep inside the process of software development, the lives and motivations of coders and the pressure to succeed coupled with the drive for originality and perfection that can pull a diverse team together to create a program consisting of many hundreds of thousands of lines of code.

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Customer Reviews

Reading this book, pretty much in one go, felt like a mix of "Pirates of Silicon Valley" and "Inside

Windows". There is enough technical content to prevent this book from being shallow (although the distinction between "code writers" and "testers" is ultimately wrong because testers in MS are not people who aimlessly click around, but write elaborate test suites instead - this is mentioned in the book but is not very clear), but the real value is in the personal angle. Author describes the life of NT project through people's stories about the development of the product - direction changes, added features, bug fixing marathons - and the big personal toll it takes on their lives. As a former MS employee, many situations feel familiar to me, however, many things are different now. Teams are bigger, stock options are gone and the culture has changed dramatically towards Dilbert-style, however, there are still teams with great leaders who can rally people to deliver great products. Finally, use of real people's stories and especially their conflicts to describe the process of building complex software is very valuable to anyone who follows MS since many of the young eager people who worked on NT went on to become big shots at MS - from Bob Muglia to Dave Treadwell. Also, this book finally explained to me why Dave Cutler's red jaguar was parked at the spot closest to the entrance of the building.

Showstopper! tells the tale of how a group of engineers at Microsoft worked their tails (and relationships) off to build NT, including even before it was to be Windows NT. Grueling hours were used to fix never-ending bugs and deal with ever-changing scope. This book wants to be a software story equivalent to Tracy Kidder's "Soul of a New Machine" hardware story, but fails due to a lack of technical details, poor organization, and general lack of editing. While the story is very interesting, the reading experience is marred by what appears to be the lack of even basic editing; as though the author submitted a rough draft to the publisher who printed off copies without even a cursory copy-editing review. Missing quotation marks, missing or extraneous line breaks, printed carriage-return characters, poor print quality, and duplication of material in various chapters make reading the book like hitting a speedbump at 50 miles an hour.

Excellent story on how a revolutionary operating system was developed and delivered. This tells all the hurdles and sacrifice that the team that developed Windows NT went through. David Cutler was the leader of the team that brought about the revolutionary changes that resulted from the innovation of NT. As a side note, the story includes a look back into the early 90's PC industry. It was fun to note that it was considered extraordinary that NT required 16 Megabytes of RAM. In today's terms this isn't very much but back in the 90's, with RAM prices high, it made the computer needed to run NT very expensive. Overall, really enjoyed the walk through time and all the issues

that were faced by a team of 250+ people. The way that the development was brought together and the bugs finalized. It is a really good story if you are interested in the history of the computer industry.

this book goes into an incredible amount of detail about the hard work that went into building Windows NT and the great people behind it and their stories.. The clever way MS lead IBM into believing that their joint venture OS/2 was a priority for them is interesting.. Windows was their priority from day one but IBM was still the 500 pound gorilla in the room so MS had to play it smart until they seized market share.. total genius if you really want to learn about this incredibly interesting piece of history, the people behind it, and the nitty gritty tech details pick it up.. if your a geek it is a must read by the way! all non-geeks will love it to!

The information about NT was interesting, and what I was after. There were many typos though, which distracted a great deal from the read. I also didn't like how characters were introduced by their hairstyles or how they felt about, or behaved around, women. We get it: nerds are socially awkward.

This book is a must for anyone interested in computer history. Well written, it is a page-turner. It makes me more in awe of my computer when I use it.

news explained well

This was an interesting read overall, especially if you're a computer person. Learning about the personalities and the principles behind the world's most ubiquitous operating system was very enjoyable. I struggled with the structure of the book somewhat and the afterword added for the digital edition felt a little airy-fairy. Also there was quite a bit of profanity in the quotes which I did not enjoy, either. Even so, it is written in a manner that should be accessible to the non-computer-geek and I commend Mr. Zachary for taking something that could be incredibly boring and making it very interesting, especially when portraying the various individuals involved in the birth of NT.

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