



B2C Technology Story

Web Summary:

Windows Server 2003

by Leon A. Enriquez

Reading Time:

8 minutes

Reader Benefit:

- ◆ Understanding Microsoft's latest OS release, Windows Server 2003 family;
- ◆ Discover what you can expect from this OS upgrade path;
- ◆ Points to consider before you decide on a company-wide deployment.

In June, against the present dismal global economic backdrop, Microsoft officially released the latest version of their software operating system (OS) – Windows Server 2003. Whether or not this latest Windows platform iteration will enjoy popular favour with organisations and users is anybody's guess.

With official support by Microsoft for Windows NT 4 platform coming to an end, it is expected that those who skipped the Windows 2000 release will very likely migrate to Windows Server 2003.

As far as market expectations go, the software giant is pinning a big chunk of its financial hopes on this latest offering beating that of Windows 2000. Also, it will be safe to assume that this latest version will do better than Windows 2000 – which had its fair share of controversies, bug fixes and patches.



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To be fair to Microsoft, an OS of such pervasive deployment worldwide on the desktop, is sure to attract the attention of over-zealous developers and ISVs, not to mention the formidable assault of the hacker community for obvious reasons.

What's In It For Me? (WIIFM?)

The questions on every interested party's mind are understandable. Is this Windows operating system a critical upgrade? Is it necessary? Can you afford to upgrade? And do you need to throw away a lot of your old hardware? Can you afford to ignore this offering?

To put things in proper perspective, Microsoft has prioritised a few things on the company's agenda with Windows Server 2003, namely:

- ◆ Elevated security to the top priority;
- ◆ Stabilised Windows to match the scalability and availability of the powerful and expensive Unix-and-RISC systems;
- ◆ Enhanced the latest version of Active Directory;
- ◆ Synergised the .NET Web services framework into the operating system; and
- ◆ Introduced a low-end edition that meets the Linux challenge.



With security as the frequent cause of complaints, Microsoft has invested time and effort to plug the holes in this latest version of the OS. Together with the Trustworthy Computing initiative, it is this security effort that caused the noticeable delay in the final release of Windows Server 2003. According to Microsoft, the end-results are a much more secure OS release this time around.

With this version, Microsoft sees Windows Server 2003 as a stronger argument for scalability and availability – continuing the momentum generated by Windows 2000 – to justify the premium that users pay compared to the mature Unix-and-RISC systems.

Consider just a few facts: today, Windows now has 64-bit editions; support for much more memory; and support for massive SMP (symmetric multi-processing) systems. Even now, Windows Server 2003 enjoys validation for the Windows-Intel price/performance model at the high-end.

Prior to the security overhaul of the OS, the Active Directory component was somewhat lack lustre in performance, and perhaps, even cause for concern in some quarters. There's now a new version of the directory services technology introduced with Windows 2003. These obviously major enhancements now make Active Directory much more flexible in a few ways – such as in handling mergers, acquisitions and other inevitable network changes.

Notice these days that Microsoft has to defend its rear from an even more price-competitive Linux-Intel model at the low-end. Not surprisingly, Windows Server 2003, Web Edition – is Microsoft's first major tactical product – deals with the threat posed by the Linux proponents. It's quite debatable whether this limited offering will be capable of slowing the Linux revolution – with the outcome that only time will tell.

With Windows Server 2003, Microsoft has embedded the .NET Framework for Web services. Add to this several other Web services enhancements to the OS. In principle, this will make it easier to deploy .NET-based Web services applications. In essence, ISVs and developers can depend on the availability of the basic framework in all Windows Server 2003 systems. But it's still theoretical and not tried and tested at the moment.



To Upgrade or Not to Upgrade?

It's obvious to all who care to look that organisational IT budgets are limited these days. So, if you're thinking what I'm thinking: Do I upgrade, or Do I just wait-and-see? That's a relevant concern.

Whether Windows Server 2003 is either essential, or where the OS is useful, or where it's not a good fit – here are a few points to consider.

1. Microsoft keeps software licensing prices steady and affordable;
2. Windows Server scalability is enhanced to compete with high-end Unix-and-RISC systems;
3. Complete overhaul of Windows Datacenter Server program;
4. Building on Windows Server 2003 functionality and features migration path; and
5. Windows NT 4 Server base is still strong, and Windows Server 2003 won't see a floodtide of upgrades as yet. Even after Microsoft cuts support for the old OSes, there's still going to be plenty of Windows NT 4 around.

Also, you can further evaluate and discern for yourself whether you need to deploy Windows Server 2003 – from actual testing reports that will surely emerge in due course.

Consider also a fact of life in software development. In many ways, Windows Server 2003 is still a “work-in-progress,” as the people in Redmond will be quick to testify.

Yes, many new features have been incorporated into the latest version of Windows Server 2003 OS – with the last three years of painstaking effort from Microsoft. For obvious reasons, several other features didn't quite make it to the final cut.

In true Microsoft fashion, we can expect these other features, services and tools to be progressive add-ons in the next few months – after the official release and shipment of Windows Server 2003. That's not so bad from a company that has cornered the desktop and will continue to do so for quite some time to come. Some call it progress, and others bluntly disagree.

Anyhow, Windows Server 2003 anyone?



Vendor Comments

“Windows Server 2003 will enable customers to improve efficiency, increase productivity and build better performing applications,” said Danny Ong, product manager (for Windows Server 2003 product family) at Microsoft Singapore.

He noted: “These platforms provide organisations with the best possible combination of security, manageability, value and unbeatable TCO as well as a better infrastructure for IT with improved reliability, scalability and security.”

“Windows Server 2003 will help customers increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your IT operations. Also, this latest platform provides an integrated infrastructure that delivers industry-leading performance, scalability and reliability to support the budget demands of today’s lean IT departments,” highlighted Microsoft Singapore’s Danny Ong.

Box Story 1:

What’s in the Box?

The Windows 2003 Server consists of four editions as follows:

1. Standard;
2. Enterprise;
3. Datacenter; and
4. Web Edition (a new offering).

Designed as a Web server, the Web Edition is a lightweight, low-cost server suitable for non-mission-critical file-and-print sharing or hosting of ASP .NET web pages. The Web Edition lacks several enterprise-level features including clustering and Internet authentication service. Note that the Web Edition is not for retail purchase and is only available via selected Microsoft channel partners.



You will find the user interface somewhat familiar as Windows 2000. However, Windows 2003 Server comes with several new features as follows:

- ◆ **User interface:** The new version of the OS boasts a comprehensive set of command-line tools for more efficient scripting. For example, the “whoami” feature is a command familiar to Unix administrators.
- ◆ **IIS version 6.0:** All editions come with the Internet Information Server (IIS) Version 6.0 – which is a significant rewrite of the previous version. IIS 6 is Microsoft's Web server for hosting ASP .NET and XML Web services. All editions include inherent support for the Microsoft's .NET framework.
- ◆ **64-bit versions:** The 64-bit versions of the Enterprise and Datacenter editions are available for Itanium-based hardware. For example, the Datacenter Edition supports Intel's new Hyper-Threading technology which allows a single processor to execute multiple threads simultaneously.
- ◆ **Hot-add memory:** “Hot-add memory” is an interesting new feature. For the latest hardware which supports the insertion of new RAM chips without powering down, this feature allows memory to be added, and thus made available to the computer dynamically without needing a reboot.
- ◆ **New licensing scheme:** Microsoft is offering the user-based option. Under this mode of per user licence, you pay for each user connected. It doesn't matter how many devices a single user is using to access the server. This is a timely value proposition considering the proliferation of non-PC devices like PDAs and cellphones which will soon be able to connect to the Windows Server.



Box Story 2:

What the Boss Needs to Know?

Windows Server 2003 incorporates core technologies that makes the OS easy-to-deploy, manage, and use according to Microsoft literature. Beta-sites of the pre-release final cut say that the OS is capable of the following functionalities:

- ◆ Excellent Usability;
- ◆ Good Capability;
- ◆ Good Performance;
- ◆ Fair Interoperability;
- ◆ Excellent Manageability;
- ◆ Good Scalability; and
- ◆ Good Security.

For Windows 2000 Server customers who move to Windows Server 2003, there are noticeable but not fantastic manageability, directory, security and performance improvements ahead.

Internet Information Server (IIS) customers will want to investigate the much-improved IIS Web server (version 6.0) in this release.

In a nutshell, organisations that did not find Windows 2000 Server compelling will most likely feel the same way about Windows Server 2003.

In order to make an upgrade decision, these are the pros and cons that your boss should know about the Windows Server 2003 as follows:

Pros (Plus-points):

1. Significantly more secure defaults and permissions on new installations;
2. Redesigned IIS offers simpler security configuration, stronger security and faster performance;
3. Adds Active Directory cross-forest trusts and domain renames;
4. Built-in .Net Framework 1.1 and a UDDI server; and
5. Shadow Copies feature allows users to restore their own files from backups.



Cons (Minus-Points):

1. Many security benefits apply only when the package is installed on a new server, not for upgraded servers;
2. Costly compared with free technology alternatives;
3. Very little Microsoft support for programmers using languages other than .Net; and
4. Shadow Copies feature requires a client-side extension.

About the Author

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