PSR Reviews



*Bi-Monthly Newsletter for Positive Support Review's Clients and Subscribers*

## Version Control - How do you know when you should go to the next version?

***Many users are lost as to when they should go to the next release level of software.***

As a firm, we have developed some guidelines on when users should progress to the next release version of software. It is based on the universal version numbering system as administered by the United States Library of Congress - Version Control Numbering System Agency - a division of the United States Department of Congress. They can be reached at clinton@whitehouse.com.

Once you start using software of any type you quickly become aware that each software package has a revision code attached to it. It quickly becomes clear that this revision code gives the maturity of the product and the sequence of changes to it. In reality there's substantially more information available through the revision code than that. This article provides a guide for interpreting the meaning of revision codes and what they actually signify.

***Which of these two great Americans said, "You know, dear, I am telling the truth"?***

**Version 1.0**

Also known as a "One Point Uh-oh", or a "Barely Out of Beta." The vendor had to release it because the lab guys had reached a point of exhaustion, the marketing guys were in a cold sweat of terror, and the venture capitalists were ready to pull all their cash out of the company if the product did not ship.

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## Terminology - What do all those buzz words mean?

***Many do not know the meaning of all the words and acronyms that are in the press.***

Over time we have all been left in the dust by the rapid expansion of terminology and words with hidden meanings. It is with this in mind that I have compiled a general glossary of terms from several sources:

**Alpha:** Software that is so buggy that even the beta testers won't install it.

**Announced date:** The date the product manager hopes to go on vacation.

**API:** A function library with more than 200 minimally distinguishable entry points.

**Apple open architecture:** Product that will be talked about for years and delivered when it is obsolete.

**Beta:** Software that isn't quite finished, as in "beta late than never."

**Chief Technology Officer:** The guy in charge of the PowerPoint slide show who thinks he knows what he is talking about.

**DECNet:** A net that can not catch a fly.

**Fact sheet:** The remains of the specification after the product ships.

**Focus group:** Buying drinks for market analysts.

**Fully compatible:** Same old features.

**Fully documented:** Code does not work but we can tell you how it was supposed to work if we had enough time to finish it.

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## *Version Control - How do you know when you should go to the next version?*

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The company is praying that customers find it more functional than, say, a computer virus, and that its operation has some resemblance to what was specified in the press release issued.

**Version 1.1**

All of the killer bugs are fixed but several key features and functions still do not work. The functions that do not work have all been shifted to future releases and all documentation that says they were to be in the first version is destroyed.

**Version 1.2**

The vendor introduced a few new bugs while fixing the killer bugs in version 1.1 and so they fixed them in this release. The only way that you can get this "upgrade" is to pay a special fee that is equal to 150% of the original price you paid.

**Version 2.0**

The vendor delivers the product they really wanted to with Version 1.0. Mind you, it's really not what the customer needs yet, but they are working on it.

**Version 2.1**

Well, not surprisingly, the vendor broke some things in making major changes so they had to fix them. They think that they did a really good job of testing this time, so they don't think they introduced any new bugs while they were fixing these bugs. A special press release is issued to tell this to the industry.

**Version 2.2**

A reporter found a disgruntled user and some bad press was written. The vendor says they are sorry and only one error slipped through. The head of product development says, "One lousy typo error and you won't believe how much trouble it caused!"

**Version 2.3**

Some anal-retentive pain in the a-- found a deep-seated bug that's been there since 1.0 and is raising hell until the vendor fixed it. The impact of this bug is that the overall quality of the product would be put in question if the bug were not corrected quickly.

**Version 3.0**

The vendor finally thinks they have gotten it right! Most of the customers are really happy with this. It is almost as if the vendor had a cash cow. The vendor now starts to think about how they can get more money out of existing customers. There now is talk of a changing price structure for the product.

**Version 3.1**

Minor changes to meet the needs of a few new customers. The new pricing structure is now in place and there is no more "free" technical support. The Technical Support staff is cut in half.

**Version 4.0**

More features. The system memory and disk requirements now have doubled in size. You'll need to get a faster processor. Once this version is installed there is no going back to the previous version. Data file structures, as well as historical files, are incompatible with prior versions.

**Version 4.1**

Major fix of two "published" bugs this time. In addition there are "several" other enhancement "fixes." No one knows for sure but it looks like what was "unstable" in 4.0 is now stable.

**Version 5.0**

Vendor needs to go on to a new product but they have an installed base to protect. Microsoft or IBM have made a change that makes this version obsolete before it gets into the customers' hands. Vendor will cut the staff after this.

**Version 6.0**

Vendor had to fix a few things that were broken in version 5.0. Not very many, but it's been so long since the vendor looked at this software product they might as well call it a major upgrade. They added a few flashy cosmetic features so they could justify the major upgrade number.

**Version 6.1**

Since the primary developers are leaving the company and they are the last people left in the lab who have worked on the product, they wanted to make sure that all the changes they had made were incorporated. The developers were getting pretty bored in their dark little corner. (They kept complaining about the lighting but the vendor's management would not do anything - they wanted to keep costs down.) They're talking about obsolescence planning, but they'll try to keep selling it for as long as there's a buck to be made. The developers are leaving the bits in as good a shape as they can in case somebody has to tweak them, but it'll be sheer luck if no one deletes the source code.

No future versions are created. The company sells the product to either IBM or Novell. It then becomes a strategic product that costs four to five times more than a better competing product.

With all of this, it is clear that the best version is 3.1 and anything else is suspect. It is for this reason that the Federal government will now mandate that all software upon initial release will be called 3.1 so that all software packages have an equal chance of success.

## *Terminology - What do all those buzz words mean?*

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**IBM strategic product:** A product that will be taken out of new production within 36 months of this statement by IBM's CEO.

**In manufacturing:** The programmers are still manufacturing features.

**In shipping:** Someone in the 00001 ZIP code has a copy -- most likely the product manager's brother-in-law. No one else will get a copy for weeks.

**Industry insiders:** Disgruntled employees after one too many drinks.

**Long-term planning:** What will happen when the new marketing VP is hired.

**Market research:** Buying drinks for customers.

**Memory leak:** What the company president remembers telling the market analysts.

**Minimum system requirements**: The oldest PC anyone could find in the company storeroom.

**Multitasking:** The ability to crash several programs at the same time.

**Multithreading:** The ability to crash a single program in several ways at the same time.

**New and improved:** Totally incompatible and will not work with anything you currently have. Typically one added feature is once you install it, your old version will never work again.

**On schedule:** Will include a coupon in the box for the missing pieces.

**Online help:** Call the psychic hotline for technical support.

**Open architecture:** The developers didn't finish half of what was in the spec.

**Plug and Play:** Bill Clinton's favorite position. He finds out what people want, plugs it into his speeches and then plays the game.

**Press leak:** The company president speaking to market analysts.

**Press release:** What the marketing department thought was being built. Often confused with the specification for the next version.

**Release candidate:** Software built just before a major holiday.

**SDK:** A development system without documentation.

**Short-term planning:** Meeting payroll.

**Strategic partnership:** A couple of second-rate companies that cannot afford to merge.

**Technical Support:** First place to cut costs once it is discovered that the product has too many bugs.

**Technology Leader:** Individual featured in articles in several trade publications who is looking for a new job and hopes a recruiter will see it.

**Trade secret:** Another way to say "we don't have the source code."

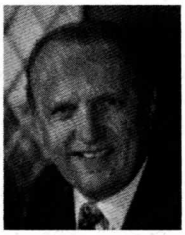
**Upwardly compatible:** Lots of new bugs.

**User friendly:** Lots and lots of gratuitous bitmaps that are not documented.

**Visionary:** CEO who has not yet bankrupted a company.

**Windows 95 or NT compatible:** The 1993 feature set, two years later.

These are just some definitions. Others can be found on the Internet.



# Forecast for the National Information Technology Market

***Short supply of experienced managers and technologist haunts many organizations just as new demands are placed on the IT market***

*by M. Victor Janulaitis*
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Readers of this column will notice that I have just changed the title to *'Forecast for the National Information Technology Market'* from *'Forecast for the National Information Systems Market.'* The reason is obvious: most of the new activities in our field currently are in areas other than the traditional Information Systems or Data Processing organizations. We can see new and exciting things happening throughout the entire enterprise.

The Internet, Java and application generators are now the rage and nonprofessionals can quickly generate functioning applications with little if any support from the traditional IT (Information Technology) functions in their enterprises. What does all of this mean?

The skills that will be in the greatest demand over the longer term will be those of individuals who know how to use technology and can apply it to their everyday function.

One case in point is an assistant producer for a television station in a major TV market. This individual is responsible for establishing the framework for his station's coverage of the Democratic National Convention. In years past, that would have meant index card files, personal organizers, form letters and manually generated interview and scheduling sheets. Well, that is not the case today.

The first thing that happens now is logging onto the Internet and Lexis/Nexis for research. Categorization and classification of the information in Excel spreadsheets and Word documents that are routed around the world via e-mail. All of this is loaded onto a laptop PC that will be the command center for the convention.

What this producer is doing is not the traditional data processing application. Rather he has re-engineered his job to use technology so that he can do it more effectively. This individual, who has learned how to leverage technology is now jumping ahead of his peers, and in some cases his superiors, to shine in his career.

More and more cases of things like this are seen today. While all of this is going on the dinosaurs of the Information Systems industry still do not get the point. We were all embarrassed by the performance of IBM during the Olympics. It is so hard to believe that for the first week they took hand written results to the various news organization. IBM then re-keyed the data into the News organizations' computers. IBM could not get their network of all-IBM computers to talk to the news networks, many of them IBM based. IBM now has a new acronym that they will use as part of their multimillion dollar Super Bowl advertising campaign -- It's Better Manual.

That aside, the supply of experienced IT talent is currently very short. With the just announced release of NT 4.0 many in corporate America are now starting to scramble to implement NT in lieu of Novell for the network and Win 95 for the desk top. Some of the best experience to have is in the following areas:

- ✔ **NT** - No longer a step child, NT Workstation is now starting to be the product of choice for the desktop. NT Server is the product of choice for the Network. Novell missed the boat on this because of greed - the price differential has now made NT the product most often chosen.
- ✔ **Internet** - The move of everyone to the Internet and the ability to quickly have a presence there put people who know this environment at a premium
- ✔ **Visual Programming** - Being able to quickly get an application on line that is intuitive--that is where the jobs are.

Vic

| Location | Prospects Short Term | Prospects Long Term |
|---|---|---|
| Northeast | Excellent | Excellent |
| Mid Atlantic | Good | Good |
| Southeast | Good/Poor | Good/Poor |
| South | Poor | Poor |
| Midwest | Good | Excellent |
| Southwest | Excellent | Good |
| West | Excellent | Good |
| Pacific Northwest | Excellent | Excellent |
| Best Location | Pacific Northwest | MidWest |

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