



The Universal Flaw in Commercial-Based OS's

2009

2 min read • 477 words

Themes: Human Centered

Designers and Developers around the world, I present to you the flaw prevalent in all of today's commercial operating systems. This is not a security hole, nor is it a CPU-capping bug. It's more of a world-view. We're simply looking at things the wrong way. **What ever happened to the days when a computer was a tool, rather than an experience?**

This distinction between tools and experiences was remarkably ahead of its time. Kenneth was critiquing the early stages of what would become the "platform economy" and subscription software model, where users become products rather than craftspeople using tools.

Nowadays, computers are viewed by the public as a way of expressing oneself. Don't get me wrong, a computer can be all of that and more. Certainly, I find a level of solace and self-identity in my software/hardware setup. But, a computer, more primarily, is so much more than that.

A computer, in today's modern consumerist mindset, is a box that runs applications that are made by other people.

Kenneth identified a fundamental shift in computing culture: from users as creators and modifiers to users as passive consumers. This insight predates widespread concerns about technological agency and the "black box" problem in modern software.

You will use the applications either because you think it will enhance your quality of life, make you more productive, cure you from boredom, or just be plain neat. No other options exist, just the software that big-name companies produce. Sure, this method does sell well and, in the scheme of things, makes a company a large amount of money in a short amount of time (which is the point of a business, is it not?), but perhaps those big-name companies should think a little more long-term for the sake of us all. What does this method truly accomplish? It makes people buy lots of computers that have power way beyond practicality. This, in term, makes software development freeze. In case you haven't noticed, we can't do much with computers nowadays that we couldn't do 10 years ago, except perhaps check our bank accounts online, and that's hardly a major breakthrough rather than an new-found application to keep everyone's interest. It self-destructs in the end when you think about it.

And this, my friends, is the central heart of our problem. In our "ever-changing" world of computer software, there is little to be found that is truly new or exciting.

Writing in 2009, Kenneth anticipated what would become known as the "tech innovation crisis"—the tendency to rebrand existing concepts rather than solve fundamental problems. His solution would be to focus on making existing tools more human-centered and accessible, as seen in his later work on Requests and other libraries.

We have a bad habit of putting a new face on an old concept and calling it by a different name, when, in reality, we've run out of good ideas.