3/15/2012 TRUE STORY

The following is a true story. Names have been changed to protect the manufacturer. [loud bong noise]

I am not a "car person". I like having a car. I like the freedom. I love learning about how cars are made and the process of deciding from a seemingly infinite set of choices. I even love learning about roads. The last new car I bought was 10 years ago. The car was perfect. It was my first navigation system. It had the most minimal dashboard—free of clutter, easily controlled. It had a built-in anti-theft alarm. It got great mileage. It performed flawless over a decade and 100,000 miles. Let's call this **Car XP**.

Time for a new car. Almost exactly 10 years later I think it is time to upgrade as the warranty is up. I was so committed to the new model of the car that I pre-ordered one and put down a deposit sight unseen. I mean Car XP was perfect perfect, so what could possibly go wrong? I received a call on Saturday morning (8:30am!) that my car was ready. We made a beeline to the dealer to pick up my shiny new car. Let's call this **Car 8**.

Car 8 is an amazing upgrade. Reading the online brochure is like a Car XP owner's dream. It has all sorts of upgrades—a better nav system, more storage, a sunroofmoon/cloudroof. It has an amazing amount of coolness under the hood —all sorts of trip meters (Car Task Manager), telemetry (Car Watson), and so on. This is going to be the best car upgrade ever.

The dealer wanted to talk to me about the car and tell me all about it. He was incredibly nice (26 years with the company). I confidently said, "I got this" and took the keys and headed to the lot and was ready to drive away. I jumped in the car. I adjusted the seat and mirrors. I am ready to go.

Holding the key I look for the ignition. But wait, I can't even figure out the key. It doesn't open up like my old one (switchblade style). I managed to disassemble the key to component parts, but that didn't help. I figure it must just be a square key so I am now looking for the place to insert the (backup) black plastic fob, figuring it was a key upgrade. I can't find it. My excitement is waning. I am not cruising. I glance over to the dealer and smile.

I am scanning the dashboard. Maybe the key is by the emergency break like old Saabs. Nope. There's no chance I am going to ask for help from the super nice dealer. I'm considering the manual but seriously, who looks at a manual for a car, especially a Car XP upgrade. As I scan the instrument panel I keep noticing the giant blue button that says "Start" that is the size of a Golden Nugget poker chip, but that doesn't quite register as a solution to my starting problem. Beginning to panic that I can't use my new car, I more rapidly scan around the steering wheel— left side, right side, underneath?

My heart racing…my confidence waning…what the heck, I push the big giant button. Everything lights up. Apparently that is how I start the car. Go figure. I don't have to insert a key or turn anything. That whole process went away. I no longer have to worry about Car Shutdown (turn the key, remove the key, place in pocket). I just touch the button and leave. The doors lock and I am free of a bunch of manual steps. The key never leaves my pocket. It is like a Car of the Future or something to me.

At this point you might think I am an idiot, an old guy, or worse…or you probably get that I am sharing this *really-happened-to-me* story because I've gotten a bunch of mail about a video that shows "just a dad" getting confused by Windows 8 (about 400K people have viewed it which is about the size of any enthusiast *meme of the day*). He wasn't able to navigate the change in Windows 8 (at least during the span of the video).

Change is hard. Change is disorienting. Change can slow you down. But at the same time, change is inevitable. But the most amazing thing about people is how we adapt to change. Most of us (apparently not me) can get in a new car and drive away after momentarily adjusting. Most of us can go over to a friend's house for dinner and when asked "can you grab a wooden spoon" we don't freeze unable to think "ok, not my kitchen but probably in a skinny drawer by the sink or stove". Most of us can move to a new building at Microsoft and probably only pull into the wrong parking lot once or twice before we adapt.

More relevant, the vast majority of customers who bought or received the new version of Office 2007/2010 spent a short time "adjusting" and then they all of a sudden were creating documents that were better looking and richer than they had ever created before. And as we know, most people in highschool or lower barely noticed the product even changed! Over long periods of study we know it took about 2 weeks to become more proficient with a new Office than the old one. Not equally proficient with stuff moved around, but more proficient.

The overwhelming and vast majority of people who used Windows 8 reviewed it positively. In a post last week I shared some of the statistics, but 75% of the stories about Windows 8 (not weighted by influence) were straight neutral to positive. And most of the negative stories had more to do with licensing and pricing things we hadn't even talked about. There were about 6 hard core negative stories about the UI (ironically or maybe expectedly among the deep tech press in the UK). On the other hand, depth Mac users such as the writers at the NY Times and USA Today were off the scale positive. That's quite a divergence.

But some set of folks are fixated on the "adjustment" or the "learning curve". The expectation that you can just sit in front of an entirely new generation of product and have it work exactly like the old one is flawed. Though chronologically reversed, think about Scotty in ST:TVH and when he picks up a mouse on the Mac "Computah…Computah"…and nothing happens. What do you think all those people who were addicted to their blackberry's did when they tried an iPhone the first time? I bet there are some funny videos floating around.

Most often, people who can comprehend the change come to the rescue of those that they personally can't imagine being able to comprehend (women and elderly, usually and unfortunately). They project their feelings about the change on to others. The way of being negative about change is not to "look dumb" (unable to adapt) on your own, but to project "dumb" on to others.

The root of what is going on now is based on three aspects of change—aspects relevant to any change (car, offices, or tech device) and are unavoidable:

- **Loss of power**. You might notice that the most vocal dislike of Windows 8 is coming from the deep technical press. These are folks that feel a sense of power as they have mastered the current product. They make their living as experts on the current product. Change, especially change that empowers a broader set of people (levels the technology landscape), has a way of feeling like a "loss of power". Different people react differently to that feeling, but some really do express themselves vocally as we are seeing. On the other hand, some of the deepest technical press are embracing the change and even pointing out that past generations reacted the same way to change (as has been shared here relative to the introduction of the mouse). Ed Bott posted a funny newsgroup thread (how quaint) on Windows XP design (see http://www.edbott.com/weblog/2012/03/why-do-the-windows-developers-feel-this-new-way-is-an-advantage/). Imagine, do folks who just happened to grow up today realize how critical people were of their beloved Windows XP, at the time.
- **Change in generations**. We used the phrase "generational change" because Windows 8 really is such a change. The flip side of that wording is that most people using a PC today have never experienced a

changed Windows (though 40+ million have experienced a change via the iPad). So all of a sudden what they viewed as a constant is moving. Given the complexity of PCs and the sense of how long it took to master, this is challenging. But generations change and people today who used Windows XP as their first experience will inevitably go through a major change in how they use computing—whether it comes from Microsoft or someone else.

- **Pace of adaptability**. People will adapt. They will adapt in different ways. Some people will continue to try to use a new product exactly like the old one. Lotus 1-2-3 insisted on using a "/" command even though a menu would have made more sense. That might have seemed like making the most of an asset of an installed base, but all it did was prevent both Lotus and their customers from moving forward. Some people will just adapt at their own pace. After 3 days I can now comfortably drink from a bottle of water while driving which took a little bit of time since I was so focused on all the cool new things going on around me. Now driving has become the level of intensity it should be. And many people will rapidly embrace change and will become the new "power users" of the new generation.

The reality of today's world is we are surrounded by "user interfaces" and we adapt to dramatically different experiences with incredibly agility. People who think the desktop is sacrosanct, self-consistent and somehow completely different from anything else are mostly reacting emotionally. Think about the difference between Photoshop, Word, and Chrome on (or in) "the desktop". Then within Chrome consider the difference between sites such as Amazon, Netflix, and the NY Times. The number of consistent elements is completely overwhelmed by not just differences in details, but substantial differences in the conceptual models of how things work. We just incrementally added all these differences so don't want to think of how different they are. A quick trip through the UI of the Apple App Store shows the folly in thinking there is "consistency".

There was a brief era in computing in the late 1980's when everything was about consistency. IBM led an effort to define a common GUI. People expected uniformity in GUIs. The stated reason was that the GUI was so complex that having uniformity was the only way to ever master such a complex system. In practice this type of thinking was totally backwards when you consider the physical world around us (there is a difference between conventions and sameness, or appropriateness and standards). In fact this topic was the subject of a well-known paper worth reading that takes its lead from the Emerson quotation "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds". (See The Case Against User Interface Consistency from CACM October 1989, 32:10). Consistency, or sameness or familiarity, is easy at first. But like tired metaphors taken too literally (an electronic notetaking app that looks like yellow paper, an e-book store that looks like the spine of books) they tire quickly in utility.

Based on the amount of email I have received and the commentary externally, there's a reasonable discussion to be had about the topic of change and Windows 8. On the other hand, this is a natural part of developing a new product that does seek to change things—and not change for the sake of change but to deliver a significantly improved user experience for a new generation of computing. Reimagining Windows doesn't happen without a few folks raising some questions along the way.

As an aside, I didn't once consider sending a letter to the Chairman of Car Company insisting that they retrofit my car with the old ignition system just so I can take advantage of all the upgrades under the hood. I have moved on and adjusted. The notion of compatibility mode for a car seems absurd. I am *very* happy with the new car. I've adapted.

--Steven

Tons of email and comments on the post about adjusting to change, "True Story". Many thanks.

There are a few additional points that are maybe worth a follow up.

Just to clear the air, while I don't have a video of me failing to start the car, the photo below is taken from my line of eyesight. It gives you an idea of what I was looking at while in a state of panic :-)

You can see the start button at about 2 o'clock but it is obscured by the wheel. It isn't a bad design – if you move a little you can see it based on how my seat is adjusted. But it is not in the steering column where the key used to go. My *muscle memory* was just pushing the key into the steering column.

With that in mind, a number of folks commented on the potential need to help people to ramp up. And perhaps maybe I should have allowed the dealer to help me a bit. I think this is a valid concern. In fact, in the video of Windows 8 "dad trying Windows" all that he needed to hear was "mouse to the corners" or "hit the Windows key". That would have ended the stalemate rapidly.

It is interesting to think about whether we need some sort of visual affordance. There are many famous examples in design where objects in the physical world don't have instructions but you figure out how to use them. A really common example are doors where if you haven't see a particular type of handle before it isn't clear whether you push or pull, up or down. Think of how many times you have seen something that looks like a knob but is really a button or vice versa. The absence of cues is around us in many places. What is it about a lobster that says "this is food"? Sometimes all it takes is one person trying something and then word spreads.

The thing about visual cues or training materials is that a small percentage of people only use them once but everyone ends up seeing them. That often gets solved by the infamous "check here to not show this again" which is almost another UI hack on top of, arguably, a UI hack. If you think about Windows 95 and the infamous "Click here to start à" it didn't last a long time and was quietly removed (in fact the registry key to turn it off became widely known rather quickly and turns up even today in Search). The feedback at the time was that no one would ever know to click there—sounds familiar.

But think of the hundreds of millions of people who became first time computer users of the Start menu without the benefit of that tip. Numerically perhaps 1 billion people managed to learn to click on that menu without "training". I know that sounds crazy, but people do adapt.

It was fun to learn that Jonathan Grudin is at MSR. He and I exchanged mail 20+ years ago when I was fighting the fight to avoid blind consistency in user interface. I revisited the topic in Office where forced consistency across products in Office was a topic of much debate as well. He brings up a good point which is that there should be appropriate divergence. I completely agree. That is why we talk about Metro style as a family or a design language across products, not a set of rules. The phone is a very small screen and so by definition a different set of rules will apply as you try to build apps and do the layout for your experience. With Kinect or a controller on XBOX the way you interact is so fundamentally different that trying to be a slave to what is on the phone or in Windows would be a mistake. We influence each other and speak the same language, but different dialects are celebrated.

But how do we get in front of the perception? I think just as any new product comes out we have to articulate the benefits and the positives. Since any product that is new is, by definition, different than what you used before (or didn't use before) there is a role for marketing and communications. People understand benefits and if we clearly articulate those then all else follows. No product gets introduced without changing the way you do things—and every product that causes you to change the way you do things is met with resistance and claims of inefficiency. Ultimately, you have to introduce products that improve and bring your level of "effectiveness" (however that is measured) above where it was before. We know that is the case with Windows 8.

In fact many have already been pointing out that even if you steadfastly avoid anything "new" you are still more efficient. There are people who have done posts and videos that go as far as to explain how to use the Start screen as a more efficient way to launch only desktop apps and tools. People are writing desktop apps to do shutdown (really!) just to have a large tile to do that, which is great if you prefer that to just closing the lid or letting the machine go into standby.

A number of folks have commented on the theme of "Metro style is good for tablets but wrong for desktops". This one is tricky to talk about because it presumes a very static world. I've been going back and forth in email with folks on this one. In general, I am sort of wondering what one considers a laptop with a touch screen or what happens if you dock your tablet and use a keyboard and a high resolution monitor? These all show how the notion of tablet and desktop are essentially antiquated concepts (already) as the capabilities merge. There are only two potential outcomes—touch becomes so good that everything becomes touch only, or every machine has some "hybrid" approach where touch is always available and people use it as much or little as they want. It is hard to see an outcome where touch continues to be used on phones and every other device *except* your PC. If you buy into that end state, then software that presumes discrete states of desktop or tablet doesn't really work. Do keep in mind we build Windows to look forward, not backward. Otherwise we'd never add new stuff! Thoughts?

Another similar one that comes up is the notion that Windows 8 is trying to be two things in one. I guess I am stuck on trying to understand an end point other than that—the only outcome there is rather than two in one, you just have two. That is rather than have a tablet with all the software capabilities you need you simply have a tablet with some capabilities and a laptop with those capabilities and more. In other words, if two in one is not elegant, how is it that two is elegant? This reminds me of the Palm Pilot and the arguments they made as to why you would carry their device and a mobile phone. Thoughts?

Finally, I just wanted to share two links that JeffJo passed along. Jason Perlow did a post today where he talked about the perils of Windows 8 (even though he says "I have an admission to make, and that is I haven't spent enough quality time with the Consumer Preview to really gauge day-to-day usability."). Jeff took a trip back in time

to read Jason's post on Windows 7 where he had the same point of view but just as noteworthy are the comments to that article that sound surprisingly like the comments in the deep technical press we are seeing.

In describing Windows 7 (in January 2009 during the beta), Jason says:

> I find it difficult to believe that Windows 7 was created to be easier to use than Vista — if anything, they've introduced a number of UI changes that make the system much harder to navigate, particularly if you've never used Vista and are going direct to Windows 7 from Windows XP, which is the path that many users will experience.

Sound familiar?

One of the first comments says:

> It's as if they are programmers working in isolation without any regard to how people have been using windows for the last decade.
> Microsoft built a certain customer base due to familiarity; things were predictable from one PC to another, and from one OS to a newer one.
> With vista and now Win7, it's broken.
> As a customer, if I'm being forced to accept changes I don't like or want, then why shouldn't I just pick up a Mac at Best Buy. Or load Linux. Too much change just gives customers the excuse to go exploring for alternatives.

Sound familiar?

We're watching and paying close attention. We will do the right thing. No one should worry. In the meantime, be sure to check out these links:

- [Windows 8 Consumer Preview Hands On: No Going Back](#) (Gizmodo)
- [Hands On With Windows 8 Consumer Preview](#) (PC Magazine)
- [Microsoft unveils Windows 8](#) (USA Today)
- [2-for-1: Can Windows 8 satisfy both the desktop and the tablet?](#) (Ars Technica)
- [A Review of the Windows 8 Beta](#) (NY Times)