

Niche Software Steals Microsoft's Thunder.

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When you think of software and personal computers (PCs), you think Microsoft.

The global software giant dominates the PC market in both penetration and pocketbook.

It seems you can't go a single day without seeing at least one news story and several advertisements for Microsoft or a Microsoft product.

But that doesn't mean Microsoft dominates in every corner of the market; in fact, as the software behemoth gets bigger, numerous niche software offerings spring up to fill in the gaps left in Microsoft's wake.

As you'll see, a couple of these niche software programs have managed to either beat Microsoft to the punch, or even steal market share away from the seemingly invincible company.

** FeedDemon **

FeedDemon software (\$29.95) enables you to subscribe to and read RSS Feeds (Real Simple Syndication).

RSS has emerged as the preferred way to share news and other content with subscribers across the Internet without the use of email.

The advantage to subscribers: as news, blogs, or other content updates somewhere online, subscribers receive virtually instant notification just by opening up their reader.

This represents a huge time savings since subscribers can receive updates without surfing individual sites to chase down stories or wading through piles of spam to find the content they actually want.

The advantage to publishers: no worrying about whether email notifications, news releases, or blog updates made it past the spam filters or unreliable mail servers.

Though many free RSS reader software packages exist (just do a search on Google.com for "free rss reader"), FeedDemon offers an unmatched suite of tools that enable serious RSS subscribers the power and flexibility to mix and match feeds, including the new "POD Casting" craze where content providers syndicate audio content (MP3) over the web.

Available from www.bradsoft.com/feeddemon/, FeedDemon sets the standard for RSS readers in a market that Microsoft has yet to even address with any of its software products.

I'll make a daring prediction here: watch for Microsoft or another large player to purchase FeedDemon rather than try to reinvent the wheel and build a product brand themselves.

** FireFox Web Browser **

Security problems always seem to plague the Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE) Web browser.

In fact, last year the problem got so bad, it forced Microsoft to release one of the largest free software upgrades (Service Pack 2) in the history of computing.

According to both OneStat.com and Website Story, two of the Web's leading Web analytics companies, Microsoft's

IE market share has dipped below 90%.

See actual stats from Website Story Here:

<http://www.websidestory.com/services-solutions/datainsights/spotlight.html>

In response to serious security threats to Internet Explorer, an upstart browser named FireFox from Mozilla.org took off like a rocket ship in late 2004.

Available free from www.Mozilla.org, FireFox offers not only a full-featured Web browser without the security problems, but also a number of features not available on Internet Explorer.

Probably the most popular feature Firefox offers over IE is "Tabbed Browsing," which enables you to open multiple Web pages without opening multiple windows.

Firefox also limits harmful Active-X controls and pop-up windows.

Firefox tends towards a less forgiving attitude on HTML coding and may display some Web pages awkwardly, where IE displays most pages as the designer intended.

Despite this, Firefox makes an excellent browser and Microsoft should take heed that market dominance doesn't last forever once consumers see a viable alternative.

And the lesson in all of this for all you would-be entrepreneurs out there with the next great idea?

It doesn't matter how big or small your organization, it always comes back to a simple formula: Meet the needs and solve the problems of a specific niche audience better than the next guy and you'll be the winner!

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