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It seems very clear to me that if you are currently on the losing end of a standards battle, your strategy needs to be: (a) adopt the standard so you don't force customers to choose between you and the standard, (b) bootstrap that so you have a reasonable installed base, (c) begin to change the standard on top of it to get people dependent on "you".

(a) is even better if you can say you have the "best" implementation of the standard. you need to pursue (a) and (b) in as non-threatening way as possible to customers who have adopted the standard.

This is precisely what our competitors are doing to us.

1. IBM. OS/2 as an api set is a loser today. ISV's don't want to commit to to. So IBM has "embraced" Windows, even going so far as to sell OS/2 as a Windows utility (something very non-threatening to a customer). They also sell OS/2 as a "better Windows than Windows". Their hope is to then get enough OS/2 out there, which they are doing a credible job of, and then have a large enough installed base to attract developers to OS/2 as a platform. They then treat Windows as a legacy platform, making promises about keeping up with Windows api's as they evolve to reassure customers but only deliver the minimal necessary. For instance IBM is promising Win32s support today "if the market demands it", and doing the same for full Win32.

2. Sun. Sun tried for years to get mainstream ISV's to write to Sun API's for their productivity apps. Put a lot of effort and money into the program. But it failed because ISV's were instead tied up on the high volume platforms, namely MS-DOS and Windows. They were forcing ISV's to choose, and they didn't choose Sun. [And when an ISV did do a Sun app (Lotus 123 or Wordperfect) it was really really bad.] Sun realized that they had to leverage the competitors strength to their own advantage, ie, their new plan is Wabi. The Wabi plan is to embrace Windows as a "standard" and then wrest control away from msft via a committee. They want ISV's to certify their win apps for Wabi and get Wabi "good enough", and then start to add new services on top of Wabi as Sun/PWI (ie, non msft) api's. Wabi goal is to "level the playing field", which is a big win for Sun.

3. PWI. same as Sun — a consortium of competitors who realize their only path to success is to embrace Windows and wrest control via "standards committees".

4. Apple. Even Apple today is making sure that their new technologies are available on Windows. They have put QuickTime on Windows; they've announced eWorld for Windows; OpenDoc will be on Windows; and they've even said that they'll put QuickDraw GX and other system level components on Windows. Once again, in the past they saw they had forced ISV's to choose between Mac and Windows, and they were losing. So as much as they can, they are embracing Windows, and adding new services on top of Windows to gain api control for developers who want to target both Mac and Windows.

5. Middleware. The middleware threat is once again another example of companies "embracing" Windows as the "transport" and then layering new services on top — services with api's so that customers are now wedded to the middleware vendor. Each one of the middleware vendors — Lotus, Novell, IBM with SOM, OpenDoc/CIL, etc — used to be on the rampage against Windows. They are more clever today. The rhetoric is now in "support" of Windows. They all say they want to have "great support for Windows (or Chicago). But also they reduce Windows to a "BIOS" or "transport" level, and position themselves as the new supplier of value-added services.

6. Novell. Novell falls under 2 (Wabi) and 5 (Middleware). They also try to sell Novell DOS as the "best DOS for Windows". Their straetgy with Appware will be an incremental, insidious one. Get developers using Appware step by baby step, at each turn of the crank, requiring the ISV to use a bit more of Appware framework to access the new service. They are not going head to head with Windows; in fact, they say they want to have "great Chicago support". Thus they appear non-threatening to their customer while getting on the inside and in a position to assert control step by step.

I could come up with a dozen more examples. There are lessons here for us. To me, it means that to win in the server business, we need to embrace Netware, adopt their key protocols, and then as we build more advanced services, start to turn the crank.